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Excellence is the highest form of resistance : African American reformers in the pre-Civil War north.

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EXCELLENCE IS THE HIGHEST FORM OF RESISTANCE: AFRICAN AMERICAN REFORMERS IN THE PRE-CIVIL WAR NORTH

A Dissertation Presented

by

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ABSTRACT

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AFRICAN AMERICAN REFORMERS IN THE PRE-CIVIL WAR NORTH

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This dissertation departs from current literature that treats moral reform as a conservative force in American history by focusing on the political intent of black reform activity. My overall goal is to dissociate black reform efforts from "middle-class" thinking by describing how free blacks in Philadelphia and New York City sought political change through moral improvement. In chapters on literary societies, educated ministers, Sunday schools and apprenticeships, I demostrate the relationship between moral reform and political action. My premise is that lacking political rights and access to more direct means of protest, free blacks embraced moral reform to achieve racial advancement, refusing to accept their inferior status.

However, most historians do not regard moral reform as being a legitimate form of protest. In fact, antebellum black leaders often have been unfairly disparaged in the historical record for their nonviolent reform methods. This dissertation calls for a new paradigm that merges moral reform with violent "political" action without assigning worth to either approach. It ultimately reflects the need for historians to allow for less

explicitly "political" forms of protest, especially among relatively powerless groups who were precluded from directly confronting authority. This dissertation also joins with a growing body of literature that questions the presumed conservatism of "middle-class" America. Since all social classes are historically constructed, they do not possess a predetermined or fixed politics.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The roots of the early nineteenth century moral reform movement have been effectively tied to the advent of industrialization and the need for northern capitalists to create a new labor discipline. This dominant interpretation emphasizes the social control objectives of employers who promoted hard work, thrift and sobriety, or "middle-class" morality, to regulate the behavior of intractable workers. A related theory regards the movement as a response to a decline in moral values caused by rapid urbanization, and the concomitant need to uphold virtue and self-restraint to sustain republicanism. A convincing body of evidence supports both explanations. However, the historical stress on social control and manipulation of the masses does not address how marginalized groups used moral reform as a means of empowerment.

This dissertation departs from current literature that treats moral reform as a conservative force in American history by focusing on the political nature of black reform activity. My overall purpose is to dissociate black reform efforts from "middle-class" thinking. My premise is that, notwithstanding social cleavages, black class divisions were attenuated throughout the pre-Civil War period because all northern blacks were the targets of racism with little opportunity for social advancement. For the most part, they did not comprise a substantial "middle" layer of artisans and mechanics; nor did they enjoy the advantages of white patronage like their southern counterparts. The abolition of slavery also undermined a potential source of class divisions in northern free black communities. Even "middle-class" northern blacks were excluded from practicing the more lucrative trades and from entering white establishments, and they seldom were employed in a supervisory capacity. While black reformers often did

possess more wealth and education than the free black majority, they simply do not fit our customary understanding of "middle-class" status in terms of income or attitude.

This study thus speaks to the complexities of social class identity and joins with a growing body of literature that calls for a concept of class that is more flexible. Historian Robert Johnston stresses this point when he refers to "different kinds of middle classes" in America. He sees "class" as a dynamic process created by a given set of historical forces, maintaining "if people are genuinely making their own history, they are making their own classes as well." Otherwise, you will find "roughly the same working class" operating everywhere.[1] His observation is especially relevant to the topic at hand. In a very real sense, the black "middle-class" was the working class insofar as many "middle-class" blacks performed manual labor, practicing industry, frugality and sobriety to avoid destitution. This reality does not necessarily reflect the internalization of values antithetical to their interests. In addition, the desire of a racially proscribed group to enhance their degraded condition should not be seen as a "middle-class" aspiration. This association only undercuts the political intent of black reform activity, and confuses black reformers' quest for equality with a longing for "middle-class" standing.

Too often, black moral reform is simply seen as an extension of the broader reform movement and not adequately examined within its own context. Specifically, the so-called bourgeois values of hard work, thrift and sobriety assumed a social significance for free blacks that they did not assume for whites. One might even say

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[1] Robert Johnston, The Radical Middle Class: Populist Democracy and the Question of Capitalism in Progressive Era Portland (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003) 13.

that free blacks were operating under a moral handicap. Writing in the early decades of the twentieth century, W. E. B. DuBois noted that there was a deep seated feeling in the minds of many that the "black problem" in America was primarily a matter of morality, and that the real basis of racism in the United States was the fact that blacks manifested a total disregard for private property, truthfulness and sexual mores.[2] One hundred years earlier, similar allegations figured prominently in scientific theories concerning innate racial inferiority and fueled efforts to deport free blacks out of the country. Indeed, one of the most powerful arguments made by slaveholders against general emancipation was the immoral condition of free blacks living in northern cities. Given this thinking, the misbehavior of a single individual debased the entire free black community, prompting black abolitionists to promote the practice of sound morality. They hoped to prove that slaves could act responsibly as freemen by pointing to the model behavior of their brethren who were already free, essentially seeking political change through morality.

This dissertation thus calls for an expanded vision of "political" action and the nature of resistance, especially when one considers the limited options available to free blacks during the antebellum period. It is evident from my reading of black abolitionist papers, autobiographies, convention minutes and newspapers that moral reform was a necessary feature of nineteenth century black political culture. This research also speaks to the interplay between accommodation and resistance, disputing the idea that

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[2] W. E. B. DuBois, Morals and Manners Among Negro Americans (Atlanta, Georgia: The Atlanta University Press, 1914) 5, Special Collections, University of Massachusetts Amherst.

resistance to racial oppression can only be expressed outside of an American value system.

My research examines the reform activities of antebellum free blacks living in Philadelphia and New York City. Each chapter reviews a particular theme to clarify the relationship between moral reform and political activity in light of historiography that associates moral reform with "middle-class" ideology. While my broader objective is to blur social class distinctions, chapters one through three, on reform ideology, literary societies, and learned clergy, tend to center on moral reform and black leaders. Chapters four and five, on Sunday schools and apprenticeships, concentrate more so on moral reform among average black Americans. This methodology enables me to study various facets of moral improvement, while addressing the class dimensions of the movement. In doing so, I also want to assess the black majority's response to moral reform measures. Although the perception is that the mass of free blacks opposed the movement, their reaction has not been studied in a systematic fashion and still remains obscured in the record.

In addition, since education was the linchpin of black reform efforts, it forms the basis of several chapters. However, the pursuit of education also has been identified as a bourgeois objective, characteristic of industrial society and "middle-class" mentality. Many theorists have maintained that while education might enhance an individual's employment opportunities, it does not alter class relations fundamentally. Furthermore, through literacy, subordinate groups are taught the values of the dominant classes, thwarting their ability to develop revolutionary ideas or true class-consciousness. These arguments do have merit. However, education does not necessarily preclude one from

engaging in radical politics. In many cases, it actually serves as a prerequisite for participating in the political process, especially given the way in which historians currently define "political" involvement. Education, in fact, enabled northern free blacks to gain knowledge of the law and the workings of government, giving them access to information necessary to pursue civil rights. Consequently, black reformers valued education above all else, perceiving it as being crucial to moral development.

In chapter one, "Morality and the 'Middle-Class': Black Political Reformers", I examine the conditions surrounding the rise of the black moral reform movement, the political nature of black reform ideology, and the class structure of northern free black society. My purpose is to show inherent differences between black reformers and the broader reform community.

Chapter two, "Knowledge is Light – Knowledge is Power: Black Literary Societies and the Banneker Institute", gives an overview of black literary societies founded in New York City and Philadelphia. It focuses on the Banneker Institute, a black male literary club established in Philadelphia in 1853 that sought to raise the intellectual awareness of the free black community. This section explores the political implications of this objective and the social composition of the Institute's members.

Chapter three, "Unlettered Clergy: The Push for an Educated Ministry in the African Methodist Episcopal Church", centers on disputes over educational requirements set for ministers in 1843. It evaluates why the Church began promoting education and how the religious community responded to the new emphasis on formal schooling.

Chapter four, "Literacy or Conversion?: Free Black Involvement in the Sunday School Movement", reviews free black enrollment in Sunday school unions and considers what motivated free blacks to attend Sunday schools.

Chapter five, "A Species of Slavery: Indentured Children of Blacks Born Free", discusses apprenticeships for black youth arranged by antislavery societies to determine whether parents were generally receptive to labor contracts intended to teach their children both skilled trades and industrious habits.

CHAPTER 1

MORALITY AND THE "MIDDLE-CLASS": BLACK POLITICAL REFORMERS

Moral reform did not always carry the negative connotation that it does today. In the early nineteenth century, it often was seen as a positive force that made it possible for members of the poorer classes to improve their material circumstances through hard work, thrift and sobriety. This belief in social progress through human exertion, which first developed from the ideas of the Enlightenment, challenged long-standing assumptions about the inevitability of poverty and social inequality. The Second Great Awakening also struck a blow to the Old World culture of deference and patronage. Protestant evangelicals, who preached liberty and equality before God, refused to acknowledge the authority of learned theologians to interpret scripture, instead placing emphasis on a lay clergy. Likewise, republicans of the Revolutionary War period rejected the idea that inherited wealth conferred social class privilege. They called for a new social order based on virtue and merit. The main point here is that all three movements saw an evolution in standards of decency. Reformers came of age when the threshold of human dignity had been raised and man's potential for self-improvement seemed limitless.

Yet, historians usually portray moral reform as a conservative movement. Beginning with Clifford S. Griffin's landmark text in 1960, a number of historians have effectively linked the onset of moral reform to the ascendance of industrial capitalism in

the early nineteenth century.[1] The crux of their argument is that the lure of economic advancement through hard work, thrift and sobriety ultimately reconciled the masses to a stricter work routine. Similarly, the religious revivals of the 1820s are even regarded as an outgrowth of class tensions brought on by the rise in domestic manufacturing after 1815. Indeed, it does appear that the Protestant stress on piety, prudence and social peace blended with the habits of industrial capitalism to produce a core set of values now known as "middle-class" morality.

However, this reading of the record does not address how black reformers used morality to open opportunity. Their actions should be distinguished from those concerned foremost with maintaining urban order in the emerging industrial economy. Thus, this chapter deviates from conventional historiography that depicts moral reform as a conservative philosophy by presenting evidence of black reform activity independent of "middle-class" goals. To this end, I examine the conditions surrounding the rise of the black moral reform movement, the political nature of black reform ideology, and the class structure of northern free black society. I submit that, rather than a restraining influence, black moral reform is best understood as a motivating force.

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[1] See Paul E. Johnson, Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society & Revivals in Rochester, NY, 1815-1837 (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978); Sean Wilentz, Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788- 1850 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984); Alan Dawley, Class and Community: The Industrial Revolution in Lynn (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976); Paul Boyer, Urban Masses & Moral Order in America, 1820-1920 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978); John S. Gilkeson, Jr., Middle-Class Providence, 1820-1940 (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1986); Raymond A. Mohl, Poverty in New York, 1783-1825 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971); Ronald G. Walters, American Reformers, 1815-1860 (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978); Clifford S. Griffin, Their Brothers' Keepers: Moral Stewardship in the US, 1800-1865 (New York, Crown Publishers, 1960).

The Origins of Black Moral Reform

Black reform activity can be traced to the eighteenth century when black mutual aid societies were founded in Newport, Rhode Island (1780), Philadelphia (1787), and Boston (1796).[2] Unverified accounts also indicate that in New York City, the African Society for Mutual Relief began meeting privately as early as 1784, although the organization was not publicly established until 1808.[3] These offshoots of earlier black mutual aid societies formed during the early national period functioned primarily as incipient insurance agencies, providing members with disability benefits, funeral funds and pensions, sickness and death payments. These agencies placed special emphasis on providing proper burials for deceased members, reflecting a reverence for the dead deriving from the West African belief that the departed continued to exert influence over the secular world.[4] On a more mundane plane, black burial services also "relieved white officials from having to tend to black corpses..."[5]

Black mutual aid societies differed from comparable white agencies in terms of their focus on decent burials, their range of services, and their high regard for morality.[6]

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[2] Elizabeth Rauh Bethel, The Roots of African-American Identity: Memory and History in Free Antebellum Communities (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997) 70; Robert C. Dick, Black Protest: Issues and Tactics (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1974) 47.

[3] Records of the New York African Society for Mutual Relief, Schomburg Center for Research in Black History and Culture, microfilm (in bio/history).

[4] Robert L. Harris, Jr., "Early Black Benevolent Societies, 1780-1830: The Wellspring of Afro-American Institutional Life," Massachusetts Review 20 (Autumn 1979): 612-13.

[5] Ibid. 618.

[6] R. Harris Jr., "Early Black Benevolent Societies" 613-14, 616.

They also outnumbered white mutual aid societies founded during the same period.[7] By 1837, 80 black mutual aid societies existed in Philadelphia alone, with a combined membership of close to 8000 people. Nearly half of all black adult Philadelphians belonged to at least one mutual aid society by 1848.[8] Similarly, at least 119 black mutual aid societies were established in New York during the antebellum era.[9] Notably, their proliferation stemmed from the acute economic insecurity of northern free blacks, and their existence "was not merely a process of urbanization...but a key element in the transition from slavery to freedom."[10]

The number of slaves in Philadelphia and its adjoining districts stood at about 1500 in 1767, but only 55 slaves remained in that city by 1800.[11] The decline of Philadelphia's slave population, which contributed to the rapid expansion of its free black community, was due to Pennsylvania's close proximity to Maryland and Virginia where many slaves were manumitted after the Revolutionary War. Likewise, hundreds of manumitted and fugitive slaves migrated into Manhattan from its hinterland during the Revolutionary War period, so that New York City's free black population tripled

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[7] Theodore Hershberg, "Free Blacks in Antebellum Philadelphia: A Study of Ex-Slaves, Freeborn, and Socioeconomic Decline," Journal of Social History 2 (Winter 1971-72): 196.

[8] R. Harris, Jr., "Early Black Benevolent Societies" 611; Benjamin Quarles, Black Abolitionists (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969) 101.

[9] Quarles, Black Abolitionists 101.

[10] R. Harris, Jr., "Early Black Benevolent Societies" 608.

[11] Gary B. Nash and Jean R. Sunderland, Freedom by Degrees: Emancipation in Pennsylvania and Its Aftermath (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991) 16, 57.

between 1790 and 1800, becoming home to the largest northern free black community during the post-War era.[12]

Black mutual aid societies responded to this influx by sponsoring programs of "self-improvement" designed to advance the social status of freed slaves. For clarification, the term "self-improvement" combined the three related elements of self-help, moral reform, and education to describe the politically motivated effort by free blacks to achieve racial advancement.[13] Self-help undergirded all "self-improvement" activity insofar as it affirmed that free blacks take responsibility for their own social progress based on a realistic assessment of their life experiences and circumstances. Black mutual aid societies, in fact, were based on this self-help principle and reflected this thinking by providing free blacks with both financial assistance and educational opportunities.

Shortly after its first public meeting, New York City's African Society for Mutual Relief advised that it would both protect against indigence and "improve the mind."[14] A year later, the city's African Marine Fund stipulated that its monthly dues would be used not only to support sick and poor fund members, but also to educate

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[12] Leslie Maria Harris, "Creating the African American Working Class: Black and White Workers, Abolitionists and Reformers in New York City, 1785-1863," diss., Stanford University, 1995, 31; Sidney Pomerantz, New York, An American City, 1783-1803: A Study of Urban Life (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938) 221.

[13] George E. Levesque, "Boston's Black Brahmin: Dr. John S. Rock," Civil War History 26 (Dec. 1980): 337; Frederick Cooper, "Elevating the Race: The Social Thought of Black Leaders, 1827-1850," American Quarterly XXIV (Dec. 1972): 604, 611-13; Quarles, Black Abolitionists 100.

[14] William Hamilton, "An Address to the New York African Society, for Mutual Relief," January 2, 1809, ed. Dorothy B. Porter, Early Negro Writing, 1760-1837 (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971) 37-38.

black children.[15] In 1787, the Free African Society of Philadelphia agreed to pay for educating the children of its deceased members. Likewise, the African Benevolent Society of Newport, Rhode Island resolved to create a free school for people of color residing in the town.[16] Between 1808 and 1812, black Philadelphians established nine mutual aid societies – the Angola Society (1808); the African Lodge (1809); the Sons of Africa (1810); the Female Society or the Daughters of Ethiopia (1811); the Sons of St. Thomas (1812); the St. James Society (1812); the Daughters of Samaria (1812); the Benezet Philanthropic Society (1812); and the Farmers and Mechanics Society (1812). A white observer reported, "the funds of these small institutions are of course very confined, but they are never the less of much use…they have been the means of turning the[ir] attention…[to] the great benefits which might arise from a proper and due cultivation of their minds."[17]

Seven black schools existed in Philadelphia as early as 1797, including several charity schools run by Quakers.[18] "African" Episcopalians and a black secular group

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[15] "Constitution of the African Marine Fund, for the Relief of the Distressed Orphans, and Poor Members of this Fund," ed. Porter, Early Negro Writing 43.

[16] Richard R. Wright, Jr., The Negro In Pennsylvania: A Study in Economic History. 1912. (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969) 31; "Constitution of the African Benevolent Society of Newport, Rhode Island, 1808," ed. Porter, Early Negro Writing 84.

[17] Benjamin Johnson, letter to Stephen Grellet, 25 May 1816, A.L.S., Grellet Mss., Vol. 1, 1701-1818, Al.4, Sh. 30. p. 217, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

[18] American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, Minutes, 1797, Schomburg Center for Research and Culture, New York City; Edward Raymond Turner, The Negro in Pennsylvania: Slavery-Servitude-Freedom, 1639-1861 (Washington, D.C., 1911) 127-29; Carter G. Woodson, The Education of the Negro Prior to 1861 (New York: Arno Press, 1968) 104.

also created two more schools sometime shortly before 1805.[19] In 1787, in New York City, nine years after the New York Manumission Society founded its first school for black children, 140 students were enrolled in its two schools.[20] Two other black schools were established in that city under the auspices of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in 1803.[21] As early as 1798, blacks in Boston opened an African school after they had twice unsuccessfully petitioned for the establishment of a black school at public expense.[22]

Prior to the rise of public education, most black children were taught in charity schools run either by local churches or by nondenominational boards comprised of prominent white citizens. The Society of Friends took the lead in educating Philadelphia's black youth free of charge during the eighteenth century.[23] In 1789, they founded the "Young Men's Society for the Free Instruction of Colored People" in Philadelphia's Southwark district. This society "for many years kept a school, during the winter evenings, in Willing's Alley, which was attended by 50 to 60 male scholars,

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[19] Turner 129-30.

[20] Graham Russell Hodges, Root & Branch: African Americans in New York & East Jersey, 1613-1863 (Chapel Hill: University of South Carolina Press, 1999) 217; Pomerantz 222; Raymond A. Mohl, Poverty in New York, 1783-1825 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971) 176-77.

[21] L. Harris 81.

[22] Bethel 67; Porter, ed., Early Negro Writing, 79; James Horton and Lois Horton, Black Bostonians: Family Life and Community Struggle in the Antebellum North (New York: Holmes & Meir, 1979) 70.

[23] Gary B. Nash, Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988) 203; Johnson letter to Stephen Grellet; Samuel Breck, unpublished manuscript on institutions founded by the Quakers, Society Miscellaneous Collection, Box 10-B, no. 425, n.d., Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

mostly adults; some of whom made rapid progress in their studies. Many learned to read, and write a legible hand, and some made considerable advancement in arithmetic." Both slaves and free blacks attended.[24] The Anglican Church also assumed responsibility for early black education. It was reported that slaves in New York "flocked" to the first school established for them in 1703 under the auspices of the Church of England.[25] Again, the New York Manumission Society (formed in 1785 by the Church of England and the Society of Friends) established the first African Free Schools, founded in 1787 and 1792, respectively. These institutions ultimately evolved into New York City's black public school system.

Pennsylvania first mandated that each county provide education for all poor children at public expense in 1790. New York City followed suit in 1805 when it too founded its first publicly funded school system.[26] However, fearing that white pupils would be adversely affected by "the bad moral habits of black children", a clear pattern of racially segregated schools was soon established.[27] In addition, in many instances, free blacks themselves initiated the formation of separate educational institutions.

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[24] Isaac T. Hopper, Kidnappers in Philadelphia: Isaac Hopper's Tales, 1780-1843, ed. Daniel E. Meaders (New York: Garland Press, 1994) 183; Nash, Forging Freedom 203.

[25] Hodges 55-62; Nash, Forging Freedom 17, 22.

[26] Edward J. Price, Jr., "School Segregation in Nineteenth Century Pennsylvania," Pennsylvania History 43 (Apr. 1976): 122; Harry C. Silox, "Delay and Neglect: Negro Public Education in Antebellum Philadelphia, 1800-1860," Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography 97 (Oct. 1973): 444; Carrol Smith Rosenberg, Religion and the Rise of the American City, the NYC Movement, 1812-1870 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1971) 27; Mohl 28, 181, 183; Frank Glenn Lankard, A History of the American Sunday School Curriculum (New York: Abingdon, 1927) 41-42.

[27] C. Peter Ripley, ed., The Black Abolitionist Papers, 5 vols. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1986) vol. 2, 8; W. E. B. DuBois, The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study (Philadelphia, (cont.)

Although northern blacks' early interest in formal schooling suggests their awareness of the relationship between education and social mobility in a democracy, historians maintain that no general philosophy of social progress through education existed in America during its early national period.[28] Their findings indicate that white benevolent associations organized around the turn of the century (usually run by Quakers or Calvinists) never considered changing the social structure through education, assuming that poverty was a permanent feature of laboring classes in all societies.[29] Nonetheless, increased emphasis was placed on mass education after the Revolution because lawmakers believed that the new republic required an informed citizenry; and schools formed during this period imparted not only the rudiments of an elementary education, but those religious and moral values deemed necessary to sustain self-government (such as piety, self-restraint and respect for authority.) The main point here is that education during the early national period was geared toward producing virtuous citizens, not "upwardly mobile men in search of [economic] opportunities..."[30] It was not until the rise of industrial capitalism in the mid-1820s that education came to

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1899) 84, 88; Leon Litwack, North of Slavery – The Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860 (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press) 47; Nash, Forging Freedom 208.

[28] Bethel 133; John S. Gilkeson, Jr., Middle-Class Providence, 1820-1940 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986) 76-79; Robert Ernst, Immigrant Life in New York City, 1825-1863 (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1949) 16.

[29] Rosenberg 3, 29, 59; Mohl 159.

[30] Gilkeson, Jr. 76-77.

symbolize social mobility as well as public virtue, and that the link between formal learning and economic advancement became clear.[31]

However, it appears that northern blacks expected social progress through education at least a generation before America's transition to an industrial economy and the advent of the broader moral reform movement. Indeed, a historian of black religion has written that while "most white American religious leaders viewed religious and moral-oriented education as an essential means of preparing the white population to live in a 'free and democratic society'", northern blacks viewed the same style education as a means of racial advancement.[32] At the same time, whites began conflating "color with intelligence", challenging the mental capacity of free blacks.[33]

Although pseudoscientific racial theories did not gain currency until mid-century, many whites considered blacks to be a sub-specie of humanity, inherently incapable of deep thought or even reason by the early nineteenth century.[34] In his 1792 letter to then Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson appealing for an end to slavery, mathematician and astronomer Benjamin Banneker acknowledged that blacks "have long been looked upon with an eye of contempt and have long been considered rather as

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[31] Ibid. 79; Rosenberg 43, 215; Mohl 118, 159, 162; Ronald G. Walters, American Reformers: 1815-1860 (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978) 176.

[32] Monroe Fordham, Major Themes in Northern Black Religious Thought, 1800-1860 (Hicksville, New York: Exposition Press, 1975) 42.

[33] Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "Race," Writing, and Difference (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986) 10.

[34] Mia Bay, The White Image in the Black Mind (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) 13, 16-18.

brutish than human, and scarcely capable of mental endowments."[35] Likewise, in 1809, William Hamilton (president of the New York African Society for Mutual Relief) urged black interest in science to counteract the belief "that Africans do not possess minds as ingenious as other men".[36] In 1813, when freeborn activist James E. Forten denounced a bill pending before the Pennsylvania legislature to prevent free blacks from entering the state, he too admitted that blacks were "already considered as a different species, and little above the brute creation..."[37] Thus, through education, African Americans sought to prove their humanity and intellectual ability by the turn of the century.

Black moral reform, with its emphasis on education, then was clearly a direct response to slavery and racism. It also was profoundly influenced by the intense religious revivals that swept through the United States, beginning in Virginia around 1787 and affecting all major Protestant denominations by the early nineteenth century.[38] Known as the Second Great Awakening, evangelical revivalism (the essence of antebellum Protestantism) was based on the doctrine of perfectionism or the belief that mankind could eventually reach a state of moral perfection through benevolent works

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[35] Benjamin Banneker, letter to Thomas Jefferson, ed. Porter, Early Negro Writing 325.

[36] "An Address to the New York African Society, for Mutual Relief", 2 January 1809, ed. Porter, Early Negro Writing 35.

[37] James Forten, ed. Carter G. Woodson, Negro Orators and Their Orations (New York: Russell & Russell, 1969) 48.

[38] Woodson, ed., Negro Orators and Their Orations 21, 23; Lankard 130.

and moral improvement.[39] This spiritual movement, which was meant to prepare man for Christ's impending arrival and his thousand-year reign on earth, would signal the beginning of a new world. Perfectionism also inspired the abolitionist movement, and faith in man's potential for improvement remained a dominant theme in black social thought throughout the antebellum period.

The millennial's promise of a brighter tomorrow also led to mass conversions among blacks during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Drawing a direct correlation between God's love for all humanity and temporal equality, African Americans identified with the Israelites of the Old Testament whom God had delivered from Egyptian bondage. The ascent of a group of unlettered clergy, the interracial character of revivals, and the initial stand of some white evangelicals against slavery all contributed to Christianity's popularity among black people. Consequently, in the years immediately following the Revolutionary War, Americans witnessed the emergence of a separate black Protestant church movement, a trend that was well underway by the late eighteenth century.

However, while black reform ideology drew heavily from the reform tenets of Protestantism and perfectionism, it still developed primarily in response to slavery and discrimination. African American depravity, in fact, was blamed on the debasing effects of slavery, which presumably degraded the character of all black people, whether born free or unfree. Many Americans believed that slavery prevented blacks

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[39] Walters 3, 28; John L. Thomas, "Romantic Reform in America, 1815-1865," American Quarterly 17 (Winter 1965): 656-57.

from forming stable families, and from acquiring the important moral and social values of thrift, honesty and sobriety.

Perceptions of blacks as an idle, disorderly class harked back to colonial times, when white Philadelphians first complained that slaves "infesting the streets after dark behaved with such rough and boisterous merriment that they were a nuisance to the whole community."[40] Their grievances prompted Black Codes to be passed periodically beginning in 1693 preventing slaves and free blacks from gathering in public places for conviviality.[41] Notably, by the turn of the nineteenth century, the propensity for African Americans to be thoughtless, wasteful, reckless and lazy was not credited solely to slavery, but to racial traits considered inherently peculiar to black people.[42]

One upshot of this deep-rooted sentiment was that freed blacks were deemed morally unfit for citizenship. As one southern planter put it: "liberty to the great mass of the negroes, in their present state of mental and moral development, would be liberty to be lazy, to get drunk, to become thieves and prostitutes."[43] White abolitionist views were hardly different. They believed that among blacks "the debasing effects of slavery [had] in many instances become almost second nature, and when released from under

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[40] Turner 42.

[41] Wright, Jr. 9; John Watson, Annals of Philadelphia and Pennsylvania, in the Olden Time; Being a Collection of Memoirs, Anecdotes & Incidents of the City and Its Inhabitants, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, 1845) vol. 1, 62-63; DuBois, The Philadelphia Negro 236-37; Nash, Forging Freedom 14.

[42] Bay 28.

[43] Thomas L. Nichols, Forty Years of American Life, 2 vols. (London: John Maxwell & Co., 1864) vol 2, 272.

the control of arbitrary power, they [are] led to indulge in idleness, intemperance, and all its concomitant vices."[44] Many whites envisioned the free African American community as a cesspool of immorality, and not a few of them preferred to link the moral integrity of free blacks to the emancipation of slaves, nearly making character a condition of freedom.

Such thinking flourished in the post-Revolutionary War period when thousands of former slaves were elevated to the status of freemen. Consequently, as early as 1786, Jupiter Hammon (a Long Island slave) directly related the moral elevation of free blacks to abolition. In his Address to the Negroes of the State of New York delivered under the auspices of New York City's African Society, he advised:

> ...if you are idle, and take to bad courses, you will hurt those of your brethren who are slaves, and do all in your power to prevent their being free. One great reason that is given by some for not freeing us, I understand, is that we should not know how to take care of ourselves, and should take to bad courses. That we should be lazy and idle, and get drunk and steal. Now all those of you, who follow any bad courses, and who do not take care to get an honest living by your labour [sic] and industry, are doing more to prevent our being free than anybody else.[45]

Thus, black reformers sought to prove by "pure and upright conduct" that "no evils would result from the gradual abolition of slavery".[46]

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[44] Edward Needles, The Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery. 1848. (New York: Arno Press, 1969) 47.

[45] Jupiter Hammon, "An Address to the Negroes in the State of New York", ed. Porter, Early Negro Writing 322-23.

[46] Hammon, ed. Porter 357, 362; Robert C. Dick, Black Protest: Issues and Tactics (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1974) 199.

However, scholars overwhelmingly consider moral reform to have been poor antislavery strategy that did not address the true nature of inequality. Specifically, because reformers tended to attribute poverty to sin or to personal failure, they often confused racism's causes and effects, ultimately blaming blacks for their own degradation.[47] Indeed, the very idea that free blacks bore responsibility for the liberation of slaves attests to reformers' inability to deal realistically with issues of power and the means necessary to dismantle racism.

Nonetheless, black reformers believed that they could level the playing field, overcoming generations of racial disparity, through hard work, thrift and sobriety. While this reasoning did shift the onus of social change onto free blacks, it also reflected a "self-help" ideology or the belief that black people must rely on their own resources to achieve racial advancement, making them active agents in their own social progress. Yet, bondage had left freed blacks distinctly disadvantaged. They generally emerged from slavery with no property, formal training, or social standing. Attempts were even made to deny them subsistence. As early as 1722, white laborers petitioned Philadelphia's General Assembly to prevent employment to blacks, stating that this "was a great disadvantage to them who had emigrated from Europe for the purpose of obtaining a livelihood."[48] Lawmakers ultimately rejected their request, fearing that it would establish a "dangerous" precedent, but free blacks were still relegated to the

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[47] Cooper 617; Kevin Gaines, Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics and Culture in the 20th Century (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996) 4; Walters 18, 63, 74, 83, 99.

[48] Watson vol. 1, 98.

lowliest positions in northern society by the early nineteenth century.[49] They generally did work "of the most laborous [sic] and menial kind", like loading ships, digging graves and wells, draining swamps, and cleaning out tubs and privies.[50] According to the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, most black women in Philadelphia washed clothes for a living; and up to two-thirds of all free black men were either sailors or waiters.[51] Many free blacks also found work as sawyers, porters, or domestic servants.[52]

Consequently, black reformers believed that it would take a tremendous amount of training, industry and talent for blacks to move out of menial industries traditionally associated with slavery and into other occupations. To this extent, they attributed economic inequality to personal merit, not recognizing how industrialization and urbanization had changed the nature of labor in northern cities, narrowing the range of employment opportunities for ordinary workers by the turn of the nineteenth century.[53] Still, their lack of insight should not be used to negate the efforts of those who sought fundamental change through "self-improvement", and historians have not appreciated the appeal of wage work to former slaves emerging from a state of dependence. They

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[49] Pennsylvania Abolition Society, General Meeting, Minute Book, microfilm, reel #1, 1799, 354 and Committee for Improving the Condition of Free Blacks, 1790-1803, microfilm, reel #6, 219, 112, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

[50] Nash, Forging Freedom 146; Billy G. Smith, The "Lower Sort": Philadelphia's Laboring People, 1750-1800 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990) 4.

[51] Pennsylvania Abolition Society, Committee for Improving the Condition of Free Blacks, 1790-1803, microfilm, reel #6, 219, 112.

[52] Turner 123-24.

[53] Mohl 34, 258; B. Smith 94.

perceived moral reform as their best defense against racist attacks and their only chance for integration into the larger society, especially since some evidence did suggest that "virtue" might bring about a measure of material gain and social advancement.

For example, during the final decades of the eighteenth century, when northern manumission rates were relatively high, slaves often purchased their freedom and the liberty of their loved ones through hard work and strict economy. Lawmakers sometimes even granted "industrious" free blacks political favor. Venture Smith, a freed slave living on Long Island in the 1770s, recalled: "my industry was what alone saved me from being expelled [from] that part of the island in which I resided, as an act was passed by the selectmen of the place, that all negroes residing there should be expelled." Working over the years as a sawyer, farmer, and fisherman, Smith managed to buy himself, his wife, their three children, and three other black men from bondage. By 1798, he owned 100 acres of land and three houses.[54]

While moral reform might not eliminate all class distinctions, it did represent hope for a new social order among those excluded from mainstream America, affording some free blacks an opportunity to overcome their slave origins and improve their quality of life. To ascribe their reform efforts to "middle-class" values or to equate them with an aspiring bourgeoisie thus distorts the nature and the purpose of the black moral reform movement and the mindset of those reformers virtually one step removed from enslavement.

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[54] Venture Smith, "A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Venture, A Native of Africa: But Resident Above Sixty Years in the United States of America," ed. Porter, Early Negro Writing 555, 557.

However, there is a marked tendency in the literature to treat all reformers as rising capitalists or religious zealots whose "romantic notions of the perfectibility of man" conveyed a feeling, rather than a concrete "political" program.[55] This thinking dismisses a whole range of black reform activity clearly undertaken for political purposes and speaks to the larger issue of precisely what it means to be political. Conventional historiography holds that armed revolts, mass demonstrations, and other conventional ways of influencing government (such as voting) constitute the only legitimate means of political action. With few exceptions, then only white males acted politically during most of the nineteenth century. Some scholars, however, have called for a more inclusive definition of political activity that would allow for less explicitly "political" forms of conduct, particularly among relatively powerless groups who were precluded from directly confronting authority.[56] Such scholars have maintained that any definition of resistance should focus "more on intentions, rather than [on] consequences." They have acknowledged, "the absence of alternatives and the difficulty of revolt may force adaptation."[57] In brief, political behavior should be

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[55] Richard H. Sewell, Ballots for Freedom: Antislavery Politics in the United States, 1837-1860 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976) 6; Louis Filler, The Crusade Against Slavery: Friends, Foes, and Reforms, 1820-1860 (Algonac, Michigan: Reference Publications, 1986) 225.

[56] James C. Scott, Weapons of the Weak, Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985) xvi; Lori D. Ginzberg, Women & the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth Century US (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990) 69.

[57] Scott 290.

described in terms of activity that one can reasonably expect disenfranchised and vulnerable groups to engage in.

About 93% of all northern blacks were denied voting rights by 1840.[58] Segregated from whites in public facilities, they could not join state militias; teach in nor attend public schools; hold civil office; serve as jurors; enter certain states; marry white persons nor testify against them.[59] They were excluded from all learned professions and many licensed occupations. Moreover, they "were vastly outnumbered."[60] Lacking political and legal rights, as well as economic opportunity, many free blacks turned to moral reform as a means of combating racism and slavery, hoping to acquire wealth and respectability through industry and frugality. Given their relatively powerless position, it would be difficult to determine a more "practical" plan of opposition, particularly since moral reform was considered an acceptable means of effecting social change during the early antebellum period.

However, once political activity became more closely associated with elections and with party allegiances, black reformers began to more sharply distinguish between moral reform and "political" behavior. Their shift in judgement reflected a more general disillusionment over the efficacy of moral reform, as evidenced by growing emphasis on institutionalizing (rather than on converting) social deviants.[61] The 1839-

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[58] Ripley, ed. vol. 3, 19.

[59] Hodges, 253.

[60] Fordham 58-59.

[61] Watters 214; Ginzberg 70, 99, 101, 119; Rosenberg 256, 260.

1840 rift in the broader abolitionist movement, which divided moral suasionists from "political" abolitionists, also mirrored this ideological split and paralleled the rise of a younger, more "militant" group of black abolitionists who disputed moral reform's ability to achieve racial equality. According to Peter Paul Simons, a porter and member of the African Clarkson Association (a New York City mutual aid society), this plan ran counter to "common sense" and was unheard of among other peoples historically. He thought that blacks should pursue strictly "physical and political" tactics.[62] Echoing his sentiments, in 1840, a black editorial read, "the Negro's self-improvement would not gain him any privileges...If a Negro could write like Paul, preach like Peter, and pray like Aminadab, the voice of prejudice would still cry out that he was black."[63] Indeed, many abolitionists began to question moral reform's effectiveness as a "political" strategy since the economic and political status of free blacks had deteriorated by mid-century.

Historians often contrast this new school of black abolitionists to William Whipper and his moral reform activities. Whipper, son of a white merchant and his free black servant, was born in Lancaster, Pennsylvania in 1804. He first moved to Philadelphia in the 1820s, and then to nearby Columbia in 1835, where he went into business with Stephen Smith, a slaveborn entrepreneur and clergyman who had established a lumberyard in Columbia after purchasing his freedom in 1816.[64] Whipper

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[62] The Colored American, 1 June 1839.

[63] Quarles, Black Abolitionists 91 (from National Reformer, in Emancipator, 12 March 1840.)

[64] Ripley, ed. vol. 4, 316n.

and Smith expanded this lumber business, eventually owning several railroad cargo cars, a trading vessel on Lake Erie, and extensive real estate in Pennsylvania and Canada West (present-day Ontario).[65] A contemporary described Whipper as "a mulatto of fine personal appearance, above the middle size, stoops a little...He is social and genial, and very interesting and entertaining in conversation."[66]

Whipper emerged as the leading figure of the American Moral Reform Society (AMRS), a short-lived organization founded by black Philadelphians in 1835 and dedicated to the moral regeneration of all Americans. When the AMRS began holding annual meetings in 1837, it supplanted the black national conventions that had convened previously (from 1831 to 1835) under the direction of the "American Society of Free Persons of Color."[67] These earlier conventions had "stressed the importance of education, temperance and economy."[68]

At the 1834 black national convention held in New York City, it was first resolved (on the motion of Whipper) that free blacks establish moral reform societies in their respective communities.[69] The decision to formally establish the American Moral Reform Society was made at the next annual meeting, when convention delegates

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[65] Ibid. vol. 3, 129n.

[66] Woodson, ed., Negro Orators and Their Orations 104.

[67] Dick 163.

[68] Litwack 48.

[69] Howard Holman Bell, ed., Minutes of the Proceedings of the National Negro Conventions, 1830-1864 (New York: Arno Press & New York Times, 1969), 1834 National Convention Minutes, 35.

drafted the Society's constitution and its "Declaration of Sentiments." Established as an interracial organization that promoted peace, "nonresistance", and equal rights for women, the AMRS was open to anyone who supported education, temperance, economy and universal liberty.[70] Whipper and the AMRS believed that black churches especially should play a principal role in the abolitionist movement, and they categorically denounced violence as nonprogressive and unchristian.[71]

The agency's stress on moral suasion and other Garrisonian principles has led some historians to maintain that antebellum black leaders were unduly swayed by white reformers. For example, the Peases have asserted that black convention delegates were "so strongly influenced" by white abolitionists that they voted to establish the AMRS.[72] Scholars who emphasize close ties between black and white abolitionists also usually view black reform efforts as being imitative of the white "middle" classes. Commenting on this inclination, James Horton has written: "black reformers and protesters generally preached racial uplift. Some historians have taken this as an indication of their desire to assimilate into the white middle class, but racial elevation had value to blacks irrespective of white society. American values were not bounded

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[70] Minutes and Proceedings of the First Annual Meeting of the Moral Reform Society. 1837. (Philadelphia: Afro-American History Series, Maxwell Whiteman, n.d.) 1 (biographical note).

[71] Julie P. Winch, Philadelphia's Black Elite: Activism, Accommodation, and the Struggle for Autonomy, 1787-1848 (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988) 111.

[72] Jane and William Pease, They Who Would Be Free: Blacks' Search for Freedom, 1830-1861 (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1974) 121.

by color, and the desire for liberty and equality was strongest among those to whom they were denied."[73]

Moreover, Whipper and his associates did not entirely repudiate "politics". In 1832, Whipper, James E. Forten and Robert Purvis (men who later led the AMRS) drafted a memorial to the Pennsylvania legislature opposing plans to prevent black migration into that state. Four years later, at the AMRS's first annual meeting, they also planned to petition Congress against Texas annexation and slavery in the District of Columbia.[74] Controversy did ensue when Whipper recommended that blacks stop using "the word 'colored,' when either speaking or writing concerning themselves; and especially to remove the title of African from their institutions..." He reasoned that racially identified institutions only perpetuated prejudice and segregation, and might later prevent blacks from full integration.[75] Ultimately, his resolution was unanimously accepted, but he continued to be criticized for his stance on the naming of black organizations.[76] Many black abolitionists believed that since separate black institutions were necessary, there should be no objection to identifying them as such. Furthermore, until segregated associations were no longer needed, they stood as symbols of black autonomy and freedom.

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[73] James Horton, Free People of Color: Inside the African American Community (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institute Press, 1993) xii.

[74] Quarles, Black Abolitionists 193; Minutes and Proceedings of the First Annual Meeting of the American Moral Reform Society 10, 26.

[75] Henry Reed, Platform for Change: The Foundations of the Northern Free Black Community, 1775-1865 (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1994) 100.

[76] Bell, ed., 1835 National Convention Minutes 4, 14-15.

The AMRS also came under attack because its moral reform objectives did not focus solely on black people. Indeed, many black abolitionists regarded its creation as a national organization "dedicated to the moral reformation of all Americans" to be highly impractical. Even William Watkins, a vice-president of the AMRS, doubted the agency's ability to embrace the entire population of the United States, indicating that its ambitious platform showed "a want of modesty" for a people with a recent history of slavery.[77] Samuel Cornish, co-founder of the AMRS, wound up spearheading the opposition against it. As editor of New York City's Colored American, he described the agency as "designed to hit every body [sic], and calculated to touch nobody." Believing that blacks should be the prime beneficiaries of the agency's reform efforts, he asked:

> Shall the colored people form a great national society for the improvement of the whole nation, or one confined more especially to the improvement of themselves? Is it truly benevolent, for them to over-look the immediate disabilities and sufferings of their own people, and aim in their efforts, indefinitely, to effect the general good of the nation? And is there any prospect that they can ever effect the greater good, or promote the greater measure, the elevation of our own people in this way?[78]

The AMRS eventually organized societies in Pennsylvania, Maryland, Rhode Island, New York and New Jersey, but there is no evidence that these auxiliaries

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[77] The National Reformer, 13 August 1838, p. 22.

[78] The Colored American, 10 February 1838.

flourished or attracted substantial support from either black or white abolitionists. The agency held its last meeting in 1841.[79]

At bottom, the AMRS was an anti-slavery organization committed to the idea that the practice of sound morality in free black communities would effect the general emancipation of slaves.[80] However, once the agency identified color (not condition) as the true source of racism, this thinking changed. By 1840, Whipper no longer linked moral improvement to voting privileges. As editor of The National Reformer (the AMRS's organ), he wrote:

> We have been advocates of the doctrine that we must be "elevated" before we could expect to enjoy privileges of American citizenship. We now utterly discard it, and ask pardon for our former error. We do now henceforth, and for ever deny, that in the republican sense of the term, the colored population need to be elevated...If we are asked, what evidences we bring to sustain our qualifications for citizenship, we will offer them certificates of our BIRTH AND NATIVITY. If we are denied admission, let the cause of our rejection be ascribed to our complexion... We therefore hope that our friends will cease to place any faith in the doctrine, that our, religious, literary, and moral improvement, will be means of enfranchising us. We need all of these much, for our spiritual, moral and intellectual improvement, for the promotion of our present and future welfare. But these are not constitutional requirements.[81]

In brief, moral reform was no longer considered an effective anti-slavery strategy needed to vindicate black rights to citizenship and decent treatment. Now, it functioned primarily to empower free black communities. This shift in focus occurred because of the intransigence of racism.

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[79] Winch, Philadelphia's Black Elite 121.

[80] Minutes and Proceedings of the First Annual Meeting of the Moral Reform Society 9, 11, 21.

[81] The National Reformer, December 1839.

Prior to 1840, despite the adverse racial environment, improvement in race relations had seemed forthcoming. The abolitionist movement was gaining ground, northern blacks were being released from bondage, and it was reasonable for black reformers to expect interracial cooperation in a democracy given the republican rhetoric of the period. Yet, by mid-century, moral reform clearly had not induced whites to view blacks more favorably. The movement, in fact, had exacerbated violent attacks against more "respectable" free blacks. A contemporary recounted:

> ...the sufferings endured by this class, from 1835-1842, were of a shocking kind. It was no unusual occurrence for an inoffensive man of colour, particularly if he was decently dress, to be openly assaulted by white persons, for no cause whatever...in scarcely any of the large cities of the North did they escape violence. Riots of the most frightful nature occurred in New York, Philadelphia, Boston and Cincinatti [sic]. The dwellings of the coloured people were burned down, their furniture destroyed, and their lives were taken...[82]

Black Philadelphians experienced seven race riots between 1820 and 1849. In one instance, violence erupted on August 1, 1842 against African American organizers of the city's black temperance movement who had planned a parade (comprised of reformed alcoholics) to commemorate the abolition of British West Indian slavery. Whites turned the procession into a "battle with bricks and stones" that ensued for two hours, leaving many black people seriously injured.[83] During the melee, white rioters destroyed the Second African Presbyterian Church and the African Beneficial Hall, and tried to set fire to a temperance building located in Moyamensing (a center of

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[82] William Chambers, American Slavery and Colour. 1857. (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1968) 128.

[83] Turner 163.

Philadelphia's free black community) where some 1040 blacks reportedly had taken an abstinence pledge.[84] Similarly, years earlier in New York City during a 4th of July celebration, a white mob attacked "temperance refreshment booths run by black street vendors."[85] Apparently, these whites did not view black moral improvement as a "safe" nor "conservative" movement.

Black political rights also had eroded by 1840. In succession, states limited suffrage to white males: Georgia (1761); Delaware (1792); Kentucky (1799); Ohio (1803); New Jersey (1807); Maryland (1810); Louisiana (1812); Connecticut (1814); Rhode Island (1822); Tennessee (1834) and North Carolina (1835). Indeed, after Maine's admission to the Union in 1819, every new state restricted suffrage to white males in its constitution. By 1860, free blacks shared equal voting rights with whites only in Maine, Massachusetts, Vermont and New Hampshire. Pennsylvania originally had granted voting rights to its tax-paying blacks in 1790, but it disenfranchised its entire black population in 1837. At the same time, all white males over the age of 21 were granted voting privileges.[86] Similarly, when New York State revised its constitution in 1821, placing a two hundred and fifty-dollar property (voting) requirement on its free black residents, it simultaneously gave poor whites full suffrage.

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[84] Winch, Philadelphia's Black Elite 149; David E. Swift, Black Prophets of Justice: Activist Clergy Before the Civil War (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989) 191; Silox 460.

[85] Paul Gilje, The Road to Mobocracy: Popular Disorder in New York City, 1763-1834 (Chapel Hill: University of Chicago Press, 1976) 159; Ripley, ed. vol. 3, 389.

[86] Ripley, ed. vol. 3, 255n.

By 1828, only 298 black voters remained in New York State out of a total population of 29,701 black people.[87]

Black employment prospects also dropped precipitously during the antebellum period. Philadelphia's free black community became extremely poor, with 70% of the entire black male population working in only five occupations – laborers (38%), porters (11.5%), waiters (11.5%); seamen (5%) and carters (4%). An additional 10% worked in other menial capacities, and fully half of the 16% who were identified as skilled laborers were employed as either barbers or shoemakers. The remaining 4% were street vendors. Occupational groupings among black women were even more restricted. They worked primarily as either washerwomen or domestic servants, and seamstresses comprised the only skilled labor category for free black women.[88] Furthermore, five million immigrants entered the United States between 1830 and 1860, displacing people of color in menial, mechanical and service industries. Consequently, most northern free blacks either were unemployed or casually employed by the outset of the Civil War.[89]

Meanwhile, black organizations committed to moral improvement flourished in northern cities as free blacks tried to survive in a hostile environment. By the late 1830s, "black Philadelphians had five lyceums and debating clubs, several day and

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[87] Hodges 192; Dick 51-52; Edgar J. McManus, A History of Negro Slavery in New York (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1966) 187.

[88] Hershberg, "Free Blacks in Antebellum Philadelphia" 198-99.

[89] Rhoda Golden Freeman, The Free Negro in New York City in the Era Before the Civil War (New York: Garland Publishers, 1994) 224; George A. Levesque, Black Boston: African American Life & Culture in Urban America, 1750-1860 (New York: Garland Publishers, 1994) 58; Nash, Forging Freedom 145; Litwack 162; Hershberg, "Free Blacks in Antebellum Philadelphia" 191-92.

evening schools, a reading room, a library of 600 volumes, a literary magazine, and a dozen of literary societies."[90] Similarly, in 1843, The Liberator reported that black Philadelphians had founded "17 Sunday schools; a public library, consisting of about 500 volumes, besides 8333 volumes in private libraries; three Debating Societies; three Female Literary Societies; two Tract Societies; two Bible Societies; and two Temperance Societies."[91] Later in the decade, they supported 19 churches and 106 beneficial societies.[92] This same trend was reflected in other northern black communities.

Recognizing the inherent relationship between moral reform and resistance in a racist society, delegates at the black national convention held in Chicago in 1853 resolved, "notwithstanding we are unjustly denied the rights of citizenship in this State, there is no good reason why we should not try to become, in an eminent degree, religious, moral and intellectual men and women, and by this means rebuke our oppressors."[93] Likewise, an 1849 editorial regarding black education read: "political power [we] have not; the power of wealth [we] cannot reach – our only hope in this

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[90] Ripley, ed. vol. 3, 17.

[91] Philip Foner and Ronald W. Lewis, eds., The Black Worker: A Documentary History from Colonial Times to the Present, 8 vols. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978) vol. 1, 147.

[92] DuBois, The Philadelphia Negro 35.

[93] Philip S. Foner and George E. Walker, eds., Proceedings of the Black State Conventions, 1840-1865, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1979), Chicago, Illinois Convention, 1853, vol. 2, 62.

country at present, rests upon the improvement of our minds, and the elevation of our character."[94]

Moral Reform and "Resistance"

Although free blacks continued to use moral reform in lieu of political rights throughout the antebellum period, historians usually juxtapose the earlier moral reform movement to the new "political" program of the 1840s. This dualistic framework, however, treats moral reform and "political" action as polar opposites and bifurcates concepts that should be perceived as complimentary components of a single process.[95] The premise here is that in the absence of political rights and access to more direct means of protest, moral reform became a subversive strategy and an integral part of black political consciousness. This understanding would explain how black abolitionists could move back and forth between two seemingly contradictory positions with relative ease and minimal confliction. Evelyn Higginbotham makes a similar point in her study of the "politics of respectability" as practiced by black female Baptists around the turn of the twentieth century. She contends, "the politics of respectability assumed a fluid and shifting position along a continuum of African America resistance" that allowed black female Baptists to stress "manners and morals while simultaneously asserting traditional forms of protest..."[96]

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[94] The North Star, 26 October 1849.

[95] Levesque, Black Boston 9.

[96] Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920 (Cambridge: Havard University Press, 1993) 187.

Prior to the 1840s, black reformers actually resorted to a wide range of "political" activities to effect social change – public speaking, boycotts, publications, "ride-ins" or "sit-ins" of segregated public facilities, court action, marches, and harboring fugitive slaves. In virtually every northern state, they organized against legal discrimination, urging free blacks to exercise their voting rights whenever possible. Even most black Garrisonians voted where it was lawful to do so and many who defended Garrison's "non-voting" position on principle were not opposed to politics, per se.[97]

Whipper's own social activism demonstrates the continuity between moral reform and "political" action. Considered the most stalwart proponent of moral reform, Whipper led black reformers in boycotting slave-produced goods. In 1834, he established a temperance store that carried antislavery literature; and two years later, when he married, his wedding cake was made of "free sugar."[98] In addition, Whipper was a principal participant in the region's Underground Railroad. His home was located at the foot of a bridge leading into the town of Columbia, a major port of entry for runaway slaves coming into Pennsylvania from Maryland and Virginia. Whipper frequently aided fugitive slaves, one night sheltering some 17 runaways whom later were transported westward "in the false end of a boxcar" that he owned.[99] He also directed community efforts to purchase escaped slaves arrested by local authorities, and

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[97] Dick 87, 121; Ripley, ed. vol. 3, 42.

[98] Carleton Mabee, Black Freedom: The Nonviolent Abolitionists from 1830 through the Civil War (New York: Macmillan, 1970) 188; Quarles, Black Abolitionists 75.

[99] Quarles, Black Abolitionists 149.

he contributed $1000 annually over a 13-year period to a variety of antislavery causes.[100] He even supported the Liberty Party in the 1840s.[101] Typically characterized as a "conservative" tending toward "abstraction", Whipper regularly engaged in civil disobedience and other forms of direct political action.[102] In fact, the conflict between Whipper's AMRS and its opponents was not over "politics" at all, but over the naming of segregated institutions and the scope of the agency's reform.

Nonetheless, historians contrast Whipper's emphasis on moral improvement to the "political" program of more radical leaders who sometimes advocated violence to end slavery. This position had become increasingly popular among black abolitionists by mid-century, although David Walker (who personified the growing militancy of black abolitionists) issued his infamous Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World, calling for a slave revolt, in 1829. His biographer, Peter Hinks, writes: "it is important to note the Appeal pertained much more to spreading knowledge among blacks and uplifting their character than it did to violent resistance."[103] According to Hinks, Walker actually was a "mainstream" reformer, but this fact has been obscured by historians who regard "resistance" as being incompatible with moral reform.

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[100] Quarles, Black Abolitionists 149.

[101] Winch, Philadelphia's Black Elite 164.

[102] Quarles, Black Abolitionists 53; Herman Edward Thomas, James W. C. Pennington: African American Churchman & Abolitionist (New York: Garland Publishers, 1995) 109.

[103] Peter Hinks, To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren: David Walker & the Problem of Antebellum Resistance (University Part, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997) 108.

In his 1843 Address to the Slaves of the United States, Henry Highland Garnet also recommended a slave uprising. Like Walker who drew from the teachings of the Old Testament, Garnet too made slave resistance a moral obligation to God arguing that slavery prevented bondsmen from obeying the commandments. To overcome their degraded status, he urged them to utilize "EVERY MEANS...MORAL, INTELLECTUAL, AND PHYSICAL, THAT PROMISE SUCCESS."[104] Blacks should employ all of the strategies at their disposal since, according to Garnet, "political power...when rightly used...is strictly moral."[105] Even after he had advocated slave insurrection, he continued traveling throughout New York State giving lectures on temperance.[106]

In addition, black conventions that convened after 1840 to focus on suffrage continued to promote education and public morals. Meeting in Detroit, Michigan in 1842, delegates voted "to instill into the minds of each other, habits of industry" by forming statewide moral reform agencies.[107] The following decade, in Columbus, Ohio, convention members likewise appointed an agent to organize moral reform and literary societies.[108] When delegates met again, five years later, they "called for the

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[104] Speech by Henry Highland Garnet, ed. Ripley vol. 3, 407.

[105] Joel Schor, Henry Highland Garnet: A Voice of Black Radicalism in the Nineteenth Century (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977) 106.

[106] Ibid. 91-92, 99; Cooper 609.

[107] Foner and Walker, eds., Proceedings of the Black State Conventions, Detroit, MI Convention, 1843 vol. 1, 189.

[108] Ibid., Columbus, OH Convention, 1851 vol. 1, 267.

establishment of Mechanic's Institutes, Agricultural Associations, and Education, Literary, Temperance and Moral Reform Societies."[109] Indeed, the purpose of the last black state convention held before the Civil War (1857) was to "foster morals, discourage an ignorant ministry, encourage education, temperance, industry and economy among the colored people, and to seek repeal of all laws which make distinction on account of color."[110] Even black New Englanders deliberated on "the moral and political condition of colored citizens" as late as 1859.[111]

These later conventions also were punctuated by calls for violence. Previously, most black abolitionists had opposed using force because it violated the teachings of Jesus Christ, and slavery was based on violence. But with growing skepticism over whether moral suasion (convincing people of the injustice of slavery) could end bondage, black reformers increasingly came to accept the validity of slave violence. Moreover, they advocated using force to protect themselves against slave catchers and kidnappers, particularly after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law in 1850.

A main point of contention during later black conventions was over slave insurrection. In 1843, when Garnet delivered his Address to the Slaves at the national convention in Buffalo, New York, Frederick Douglass said that Garnet's proposal, if

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[109] Foner and Walker, eds., Proceedings of the Black State Conventions. Columbus, OH Convention, 1856 vol. 1, 308.

[110] Ibid., Columbus, OH Convention, 1857 vol. 1, 318.

[111] Ibid.; New England Convention, 1859 vol. 2, 222.

implemented, would surely lead to "catastrophy" [sic].[112] Four years later, at a national conference in Troy, New York, a delegate said: "the oppressed are three millions, their oppressors are seventeen millions…the one is without arms, without means of concert, and without government, the other possess every advantage in these respects." He considered any plan of slave revolt to be "suicidal in the extreme."[113] At Massachusetts' State convention held in 1858, another delegate who did not want to see thousands of black men "hung before their time" called a motion to incite a slave uprising "ridiculous". He asked, "how could documents be circulated among the Negroes in the South?…They have nothing to fight with in the South – no weapons, no education."[114] Knowing that an uprising would fail and that whites would seek vengeance, William Lloyd Garrison once remarked that blacks had "stronger reasons for dreading a [slave] insurrection" than whites themselves did.[115] Even Walker was ambivalent about the use of force since blacks would have to live among whites once the battle was lost.[116] Most blacks agreed that full-scale violence should be avoided at almost all costs and used only as a method of last resort.

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[112] Bell, ed., Minutes of the Proceedings of the Negro National Convention Minutes, 1843 National Convention Minutes, 14.

[113] Ibid., 1847 National Convention Minutes, 31.

[114] Foner and Walker, eds., Proceedings of the Black State Conventions, New Bedford, Massachusetts, 1858 vol. 2, 104.

[115] Mabee, Black Education 52.

[116] Robert L. Allen, Reluctant Reformers: Racism and Social Reform Movements in the United States (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1974) 15.

In summary, because nineteenth century African Americans could not use violence successfully, they relied upon more unconventional means of "resistance". Unfortunately, historians do not regard moral reform as being a legitimate form of protest. In fact, antebellum black leaders have been unduly criticized in the historical record for their nonviolent reform methods.[117] This dissertation calls for a new theoretical framework that merges moral reform with violent "political" action without assigning worth to either approach. This does not mean that those who used violence against impossible odds should not be distinguished for their deeds, but that violence should not be the standard from which all other models of protest proceed.

The Social Anatomy of the Northern Black Community

Black reform seems far removed from historiography that links moral reform to the rise of industrial capitalism and the desire of the business classes to secure a more disciplined labor force. These studies have wedded reform ideology to "middle-class" values by identifying most moral reformers as upwardly mobile (often evangelical) bankers, lawyers and businessmen who benefited as employers from the new cultural emphasis on hard work, thrift and sobriety.[118] A related theory argues that most early reformers were Federalists who felt threatened by the ascendancy of Jeffersonian manufacturers and by a social order based on self-discipline rather than on deference.[119] This Federalist aristocracy sought to maintain power and influence through national

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[117] Mabee, Black Freedom vi.

[118] See footnote #4, p. 3.

[119] Clifford S. Griffin, Their Brothers' Keepers: Moral Stewardship in the United States, 1800-1865 (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1960) xi, 12.

reform societies – namely, the American Education Society, the American Tract Society, the American Home Missionary Society, the American Bible Society and the American Sunday School Union.[120] Joining ranks with leading ministers to run these agencies, these men essentially dispensed "middle-class" morality through private charity.[121]

Like these reform leaders, black reformers also tended to be wealthier, and more skilled and educated than the free black majority. Black property holders usually headed black churches and fraternities, and skilled or professional men often predominated as leaders of the free black community. Historian Graham Russell Hodges gives an occupational breakdown of the founders of New York City's African Society for Mutual Relief. Established as a burial society in 1808, "the first president, William Hamilton, was a house carpenter; and the first secretary, Henry Sipkins, was a mechanic." The occupations of other original members included "bootmakers, a pickle manufacturer, a soap chandler, an innkeeper, and eight ministers."[122] According to Hodges, herein lay the nucleus of the black "middle" sector.[123]

Likewise, historian Gary B. Nash has reported that black Philadelphians were employed in 30 different occupations by 1811. Most numerous among the nascent black "middle-class" were "shoemakers (12), carpenters (16), tailors (6), and painters

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[120] Ibid. 36.

[121] Ibid. 44; Gilkeson, Jr. 10; Paul Boyer, Urban Masses & Moral Order in America, 1820-1920 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978) 12.

[122] Hodges 188.

[123] Ibid 187.

(4)."[124] He even has asserted that, by 1830, Philadelphia's free black community "had become nearly as stratified as white society", with hairdressers, shopkeepers, bakers, carters, caterers, seamstresses, innkeepers, coachmen and others comprising the black "middle" layer.[125] Nash's conclusions are based primarily on city directories, the 1820 census, and statistics of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society.

While a black "middle-class" may have existed in the early nineteenth century, several historians agree that free blacks lost ground economically after 1830 (perhaps even as early as 1820.)[126] Theodore Hershburg has noted, "the social atmosphere made it considerably more difficult for even the wealthiest of blacks to acquire real property" in antebellum Philadelphia.[127] Citing the "Register of Trades of the Colored People" (compiled by the Pennsylvania Abolition Society to promote white patronage of black craftsmen), he found that the number of "skilled artisans not practicing their trades rose from 23% in 1838 to approximately 38% in 1856."[128] Even Nash has conceded that the proportion of black men employed in skilled trades fell off dramatically after 1830 as "more and more white craftsmen refused to accept black apprentices."[129] In a much

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[124] Nash, Forging Freedom 149.

[125] Ibid. 247.

[126] Litwack 162; Hershberg, "Free Blacks in Antebellum Philadelphia" 191-92; Freeman 58; Nash, Forging Freedom 145.

[127] Hershburg, "Free Blacks in Antebellum Philadelphia" 189.

[128] Ibid. 192.

[129] Nash, Forging Freedom 251.

earlier study, W. E. B. DuBois had determined that between 1790 and 1820 in Philadelpia, "a very large percentage, perhaps most, [of the] city's artisans were blacks. By 1837, only about 350 out of 10,500 blacks pursued trades or about one in 20."[130] His findings (also based on the Pennsylvania Abolition Society records) further indicated that, in 1838, "997 of the 17,500 blacks had learned trades, although only a part, perhaps 350, actually worked at their trades – the rest, (besides servants and men with trades) were manual laborers."[131]

Social divisions between the black lower and "middle" classes, in fact, collapsed to an unusual degree during the antebellum period, although a black "middle" stratum did emerge in most urban areas. Again, this "middle" group (from which most black reformers emerged) included hairdressers, shopkeepers and street vendors, innkeepers, coachmen, used-clothes dealers, ministers, seamstresses, craftsmen, mariners, some waiters and domestick, educators and caterers.[132] Notably, most black artisans worked in the least skilled occupations (shoemaking and tailoring), and "middle-class" blacks also were concentrated in service trades requiring little start-up capital.[133] Furthermore, many prominent blacks worked in more than one occupation. The Reverend Richard Allen, a former slave and founder of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, was listed variously in the city directories as a "shoemaker, bleeder, dealer, master chimney

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[130] DuBois, The Philadelphia Negro 33.

[131] Ibid. 143.

[132] Hodges 270, Litwack 155, 179-80; Levesque, Black Boston 121.

[133] B. Smith 5.

sweep, and shoe store proprietor", as well as a minister.[134] Importantly, the clergy was one of the few professional occupations open to black males, and, again, many "middle class" blacks worked in the service sector.[135]

The black social structure differed fundamentally from that of white society in two basic respects: it "lacked both a mercantile class and a professional corps of doctors and lawyers. Second, artisans and industrial workers were becoming more and more underrepresented in the black work force."[136] In Philadelphia, external constraints skewed black class divisions to such an extent that "among the largest 37 black property holders in 1837, all of whom owned $1,500 or more in real estate, were oystermen, porters, ... a laborer and a waiter."[137]

Thus, the black "middle" class was an especially unstable, amorphous group that shaded imperceptibly into the lower ranks of more marginal (often seasonal) workers. This latter category consisted mainly of unskilled menial laborers who constituted the bulk of black workers.[138] Large numbers of unemployed or underemployed blacks also lived in destitution, and a black professional "upper" class was virtually nonexistent.[139]

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[134] Nash, Forging Freedom 153.

[135] Hodges 205; John J. Bracey and August Meir, eds., Free Blacks in America, 1800-1860 (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1971) 3.

[136] Nash, Forging Freedom 250.

[137] Ibid. 252.

[138] Turner 123-24, Horton 34.

[139] Levesque, "Boston's Black Brahmin: Dr. John S. Rock" 329, Turner 127.

Most free blacks were poor, barely living above subsistence, and all black people suffered from extreme discrimination. Severely limited employment opportunities made it difficult for even skilled blacks to find work at living wages, keeping everyone basically at the same level of insecurity and deprivation.[140] Their condition was further exacerbated by foreign immigration, as Irish workers successfully competed for jobs in areas were free blacks had formerly predominated (oystering, carriage driving, chimney sweeping, bootblacking, catering and barbering.) Furthermore, most northern free blacks were denied employment in the emerging textile, metal and shoe industries.[141] Clearly, black moral reformers do not fit the profile of a rising "middle-class" that benefited from America's transition to a capitalist economy.

In fact, at the same time that the white "middle-class" was forming (1820-1860), economic prospects for the vast majority of northern free blacks were eroding. Put differently, while whites were experiencing growing "class stratification and greater spatial separation of classes", the reverse was occurring in free black communities.[142] As more "middle-class" blacks encountered poverty and unemployment, they increasingly came into contact with blacks of the lower orders.[143] In addition, although residential districts were not entirely segregated, blacks still were concentrated in certain areas and those who were most financially secure often lived alongside their

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[140] Hershberg, "Free Blacks in Antebellum Philadelphia" 198-99.

[141] Nash, Forging Freedom 145, 217.

[142] Boyer, 75.

[143] Schor 166; Reed 74.

poorer neighbors.[144] Conceivably, their close proximity to "lower" class blacks gave them an understanding of the masses that was lost on their white "middle-class" contemporaries.

The marginal position of most free blacks also fostered a communal ethos within their communities.[145] Principles of sharing and collective responsibility were clearly expressed in the numerous mutual aid societies established in northern free black society prior to the Civil War[146] In addition, black households frequently took in boarders and the housing of homeless children was considered the civic responsibility of all free blacks, irrespective of their class position.[147] This practice of caring for the needy made it much harder for individuals to accumulate personal wealth since their meager savings and incomes were often consumed by the larger demands of mutual aid placed on them by their communities. While this community standard does not necessarily indicate the emergence of an ethic fundamentally at variance with the tenets of individualism and liberal capitalism, it does demonstrate a collective awareness of the limitations that conventional "middle-class" values (which stressed personal savings) held for communities undergoing acute economic distress. These social

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[144] Wilson J. Moses, Alexander Crummell: A Study in Civilization and Discontent (New York, Oxford University Press, 1989) 18.

[145] Fordham 26.

[146] Hershberg, "Free Blacks in Antebellum Philadelphia" 196.

[147] Hortons, Black Bostonians 16-19; Association for the Benefit of Colored Orphans, New York, Constitution and Bye-Laws (New York, 1837) 3.

networks of mutual giving also suggest a fraternity among free blacks that tended to bridge class divisions.

Historians generally concede that the black "middle-class" was structurally incomparable to the white "middle" sector. Yet, even if the word "middle-class" is conceptually imprecise in describing their social status, many historians still insist that "middle-class" values gained hegemony in free black communities. The rules and guidelines of black mutual aid societies would seem to support their contention. These agencies refused to grant benefits for illnesses caused by misbehavior, and sound moral character was invariably a prerequisite for membership.[148] In addition, members who frequented "tippling-houses", gambling halls, or brothels were subject to expulsion, as were members who committed criminal offenses. These organizations also mandated attendance at the burial services of deceased members, which usually included a funeral procession. Philadelphia's Brotherly Union Society stipulated: "each and every member shall conduct himself in a becoming manner while going to and fro, and if any member is found with what the Society shall call misconduct while engaged with a funeral, he or they shall pay a fine of 25 cents..."[149] When the African Benevolent Society of Newport, Rhode Island voted to establish a free school for the city's black residents, it also elected to "pay attention to the morals of the scholars" and "to enquire

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[148] Fordham 69; Wright 31; R. Harris, Jr., "Early Black Benevolent Societies" 616-17; Records of the New York African Society for Mutual Relief 3, 10, 18, 19, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York City.

[149] "Constitution and By-Laws of the Brotherly Union Society," ed. Porter, Early Negro Writing 57.

into their conduct out of school."[150] Some societies even monitored the behavior of members through home visits, while others supported only the wives of deceased members who remained widowed and behaved "decently".[151]

It does appear that these reformers sought to control the behavior of the black lower classes and had capitulated to white "middle-class" standards. Yet, this simplistic interpretation of black reform efforts misses the movement's underlying significance, which is that all black reform activity was directed toward racial advancement. Black mutual aid societies not only provided burial funds for the dead; they worked endlessly for the living. They distributed food and clothing to the needy, raised money for black schools and churches, organized emancipation day celebrations and anti-slavery societies, petitioned for equal citizenship, and participated in activities to aid fugitive slaves. Most black reformers worked for a living, assuming "multiple roles as wage earners, educators and community builders."[152] Again, directing their energy toward racial advancement, they certainly were in no position to exploit the masses.

Moreover, all free blacks, irrespective of their class position, were profoundly affected by racism.[153] For one reformer, it was "like the atmosphere, everywhere felt

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[150] "Constitution of the African Benevolent Society of Newport, Rhode Island, 1808," ed. Porter, Early Negro Writing 84-85.

[151] Fordham 69.

[152] Anne M. Boylan, "Benevolence and Antislavery Activity Among African American Women in New York and Boston, 1820-1840," eds., Jean Fagan Yellin and John C. Van Horne, The Abolitionist Sisterhood: Women's Political Culture in Antebellum America (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994) 123.

[153] Litwack 64.

by him."[154] Speaking of free blacks, a white observer once noted their general condition:

> He never gets into an omnibus. It must be a low grog-shop into which he dares to enter, even with money in his hand...There are a hundred hotels in New York which can accommodate from 50 to a thousand guests, but there is not one of these at which a man of African blood [can] find a bed or a meal. His only place in any of these establishments is that of cook or waiter. He may cook every meal; he cannot eat one out of the kitchen. He may stand behind the chair; he must not sit at the table. The negro, though he might come to the theatre in his private carriage, and have money enough in bank to buy the theatre, could not get admission to boxes, or pit, nor even to the third tier, set apart for fallen women. His only place was the gallery, and in many cases he was railed off, even in this, from the lowest class of the white population. To-day, most of the American theatres have but two places and prices, and there is no admission whatever for the negro...[he is] never seen in any fashionable place of amusement in the Northern States, except as a menial, or with a marked separation from the respectable, and sometimes even the disreputable portion of the audience.[155]

Such treatment inevitably shaped the worldview of black reformers. Their outlook necessarily deviated from that of their white "middle-class" counterparts, despite any similarities in their respective discourses.[156] It could not be otherwise in a violently racist society where whites categorically withdrew from all social contact with blacks, as if by instinct. A white carriage driver once commented, "there are no people I hate so much as the niggers...I don't know why I hate 'em – but I do hate 'em." He

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[154] Woodson, ed., Negro Orators and Their Orations 93.

[155] Nichols vol. 1, 229.

[156] Eddie S. Glaude, Exodus! Religion, Race, and Nation in Early Nineteenth-Century America (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000) 110.

admitted, "I always drive over 'em, when they get in my way."[157] Such antipathy cannot be overstated. So extreme was "Negrophobia" in America that a European traveler thought the nation's name should be Caucasia.[158]

Conclusion

Black and white reformers were not responding to precisely the same set of historical forces because the black moral reform movement derived primarily from early antislavery efforts by free blacks to overcome their slave origins, and not from America's transition to an industrial economy. Consequently, black reformers associated moral improvement through education with social progress by the turn of the nineteenth century, at least a generation before such thinking became part of mainstream American consciousness.

Secondly, black moral reform should be considered a "political" movement since it was a collective form of social action clearly undertaken for political purposes. Thus, the current tendency to separate moral reform from "political" behavior introduces a false dichotomy into early black political culture. Although black reformers did increasingly emphasize the franchise after 1840, it is more accurate to view moral reform and "political" action as combined parts of the same ongoing process to secure equal rights.

Lastly, not only was the antebellum black "middle-class" structurally unlike the white "middle" sector, but the social reality of black reformers living under white

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[157] Edward S. Abdy, Journal of a Residence and Tour in the United States of North America, 3 vols. (London: John Murray, 1835) vol. 1, 251.

[158] Ibid. vol. 3, 301.

supremacy differed dramatically from the perceptions and assumptions of white "middle-class" Americans. Hence, use of the term "middle-class" to describe black reform efforts is misleading at best. More to the point, black reformers were concerned primarily with forging a just society, not a "middle-class" identity. While their adherence to moral reform principles may have reinforced the dominant values of white "middle-class" America, moral reform fulfilled a real need in northern free black communities, demonstrating the overall utility of certain values irrespective of one's color or class position.

CHAPTER 2

"KNOWLEDGE IS LIGHT" - KNOWLEDGE IS POWER": BLACK LITERARY SOCIETIES AND THE BANNEKER INSTITUTE

An Englishwoman observed in 1853, "no one can travel in the free states of America without being constantly reminded of the importance attached to the education of the people." She was impressed not only by the presence of so many Sabbath and weekday schools, both private and public, but by the number of lectures associated with literary societies.[1] Speakers on current events and other topics drew audiences of up to 2,000 people, making literary societies one of the most popular agencies of self-improvement in the North during the antebellum era.[2] Most cities had at least one literary society or debating club by the 1830s, although Benjamin Franklin founded the 'Junto Club' (now known as the Library Company of Philadelphia) as early as 1731.[3] Still, most literary societies emerged after the Revolution when Americans first developed an appetite for reading and began meeting regularly to discuss politics, history, science and literature, sharing as well their original compositions.[4] Attesting to their prevalence, one club gathered twice weekly in the steerage of a transatlantic ship

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[1] Marianne Finch, An Englishwoman's Experience in America (London: Bentley, 1853) 71, 73, 79.

[2] John S. Gilkeson, Jr., Middle-Class Providence, 1820-1940 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986) 81-82.

[3] Thomas L. Nichols, Forty Years of American Life, 2 vols. (London: John Maxwell & Company, 1864) vol. 1, 64-66.

[4] Sidney I. Pomerantz, New York, an American City, 1783-1803, A Study of Urban Life (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938) 432; John W. Francis, Old New York, or, Reminiscences of the Past Sixty Years (New York, 1858) 289.

to debate whether a monarchy or a democracy was the best form of government.[5] Another group, "The Forum", delivered orations from a stage that they erected periodically in a New York City hotel ballroom.[6]

Emphasis on education after the Revolution with the growing secularization of society (characterized by an increased interest in science) contributed to the rise of literary societies. However, their ascent has been attributed mainly to America's transition from household production to industrial wage labor, a development that promoted diligent and well-ordered behavior, which spread beyond the work place to influence traditional patterns of leisure. Employees now were encouraged to pursue recreation designed to build character, as well as to provide entertainment.[7] At the same time, evangelicals who opposed drinking, dancing and other common forms of amusement supported business interests in advocating literary societies as an alternative form of entertainment. Both groups wanted socializing to occur in more sedate, controlled settings conducive to moderation and self-discipline among patrons.[8]

Prevailing historiography thus suggests that literary societies focused foremost on cultivating manners, not stimulating the intellect, while the potential benefits of self-education and mutual instruction are seldom considered in the record. Nonetheless,

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[5] Henry B. Fearon, Sketches of America (London, 1818) 3-4.

[6] Ibid. 343-44.

[7] Gilkeson, Jr. 81, 84.

[8] Gilkeson, Jr. 55.

black literary societies were an integral part of an expanding network in the "intellectual war against slavery", and were established to promote education and social activism.[9]

Black Literary Societies

In 1827, a prominent black minister was expelled from a white literary gathering in New York City.[10] Shortly thereafter, black reformers began creating their own literary societies, drawing a direct correlation between improvement in literature and abolition. In 1841, they made this connection explicit: "the organization of societies for our moral and mental improvement [such as] public debates and lectures are sufficient evidence that there is a determination to apply the great lever – Education – to the unholy system [of slavery]."[11] Others shared their conviction that education might eliminate racial divisions. By 1830, slaveholders had limited black schooling in the south to oral religious instruction.[12] Indeed, noting that education made "tyrants quake" in the United States, activist David Walker urged free blacks to challenge white domination by acquiring both property and literature.[13]

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[9] The Colored American, 6 March 1841; Elizabeth McHenry, Forgotten Readers: Recovering the Lost History of African American Literary Societies (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2002) 19, 41.

[10] Dorothy B. Porter, "The Organized Educational Activities of Negro Literary Societies, 1828-1846," The Journal of Negro Education V (Oct. 1936): 557.

[11] The Colored American, 1 May 1841.

[12] Carter G. Woodson, ed., Negro Orators and Their Orations (New York: Russell & Russell, 1969) 24; Carleton Mabee, Black Freedom: The Nonviolent Abolitionists from 1830 through the Civil War (New York: Macmillan, 1970) 140.

[13] David Walker. "Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World", ed., Floyd B. Barbour. The Black Power Revolt; A Collection of Essays (Boston: P. Sargent, 1968) 24; Freedom's Journal, 25 April 1828.

Reformers, like Walker, believed that blacks could "successfully baffle [their] enemies" through intellectual improvement.[14] Learned societies would help dispel the myth that free blacks were lazy, prone to revelry, with no real concern for their own social welfare. One reformer indicated, "if academic privileges are withheld, they [literary societies] prove a readiness in us to avail ourselves of every means of improvement which lies within our reach."[15] Moreover, "if we can keep pace in literature it will show ... that we are not inferior."[16]

Black literary societies served three basic purposes: to expand the intellectual awareness of the free black community, to groom political leaders (primarily through a system of debates and lectures), and to offset an inadequate educational system.[17] With so few African Americans enrolled in high schools and colleges, literary societies provided most free blacks with their only exposure to advanced subjects.

In keeping with these objectives, the Philomathean Society was founded in New York City in 1826 as the nation's first black literary association. Its only membership requirements were "a good moral character, and the desire to improve the mind."[18] Lasting longer than any other black literary association, the Society functioned as a

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[14] The Colored American, 2 February 1839.

[15] George Walker, The Afro-American in New York City, 1827-1860 (New York: Garland Publishers, 1993) 73.

[16] Banneker Institute Minutes, microfilm, Reel #2, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

[17] Porter, "The Organized Educational Activities of Negro Literary Societies" 557, Robert C. Dick, Black Protest: Issues and Tactics (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1974) 5.

[18] The Colored American, 2 May 1840.

literary club for 17 years until it merged with the Philadelphia and Debating Society to become the Odd Fellow's Lodge or the Philomathean Lodge, No. 646.[19] During its existence, scholars lectured twice weekly on literary, historical and scientific subjects, and the Society's reference library contained from 500 to 600 volumes.[20]

Two years later, William Whipper established the Colored Reading Society for Mental Improvement in Philadelphia where young men met weekly to discuss and exchange books loaned out to members for one week. The society eventually wanted to create a library containing works ranging from ecclesiastical history to modern day politics.[21] In fact, the libraries of many black literary societies included classical texts and belles-lettres, demonstrating awareness that knowledge of this material was prized in America. Yet, the desire of some blacks to familiarize themselves with these subjects was not merely cosmetic, but deemed necessary to sharpen their analytical skills and to promote a healthy intellectual outlook.[22]

The Philadelphia Library Company of Colored Persons, which began in January of 1833, did establish a library of nearly 600 books.[23] It cost one dollar to join the club

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[19] Robert L. Harris, Jr., "Early Black Benevolent Societies, 1780-1830: The Wellspring of Afro-American Institutional Life," Massachusetts Review, 20 (Autumn 1979): 620; Porter, "The Organized Educational Activities of Negro Literary Societies" 564; The Colored American, 25 December 1841.

[20] The Colored American, 2 May 1840; Porter, "The Organized Educational Activities of Negro Literary Societies" 565.

[21] Porter, "The Organized Educational Activities of Negro Literary Societies" 559; Freedom's Journal, 20 June 1828, 26 December 1828.

[22] McHenry 51.

[23] Joseph Wilson, Sketches of the Higher Classes of Colored Society in Philadelphia by a Southerner. 1842. (Philadelphia: Rhistoric Publications, 1969) 97-100.

and an additional 25 cents per month.[24] By 1836, 150 men subscribed to the Company.[25] Along with weekly lectures on literary and scientific subjects, a series of debates focused on "race" related topics. Large audiences reportedly attended these functions.[26] One observer noted that before the Company was established, many young black men who had "never dreamed of rising before a public auditory to make an address, or engage in a debate, [are] now enabled to do so with little or no embarrassment".[27]

In 1837, John P. Burr, a Philadelphia barber, agent for the Underground Railroad, and member of the American Moral Reform Society (AMRS), established the Demosthenian Institute in his home. Founded as an elocution school for minors, by 1841, it had 42 members, a library of over 100 volumes, and its own weekly organ.[28] Likewise, slave born Stephen H. Gloucester, a Presbyterian minister, second-hand clothes dealer, and former secretary of the AMRS, opened a reading room in 1838 containing the most popular abolitionist newspapers of the day.[29] However, once

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[24] Ibid. 99-100.

[25] Porter, "The Organized Educational Activities of Negro Literary Societies" 561.

[26] Ibid.; The National Reformer, January 1839.

[27] Wilson 100.

[28] Porter, "The Organized Educational Activities of Negro Literary Societies", 562; C. Peter Ripley, ed., The Black Abolitionist Papers, 5 vols. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1986) vol. 3, 195n-96n; Wilson 103-06.

[29] Ripley, ed. vol. 3, 199n.

several "eating houses" opened up nearby that young men preferred to frequent, the reading room became "almost deserted".[30]

New York City's Phoenix Society perhaps enjoyed the widest membership. Formed in 1833, it existed throughout the decade, promoting improvement in morals, literature and business.[31] Members paid quarterly any sum of money that they wished.[32] Although black clergymen Christopher Rush and Theodore S. Wright presided over the agency, several prominent white men sat on its Board of Directors, including Arthur Tappan, merchant and philanthropist, who was the Society's main financial backer.[33]

Over 400 people attended the Society's scientific lectures in 1833.[34] That same year, the agency established a library and a reading room under the direction of Reverend Samuel E. Cornish who proposed opening the facilities from four in the afternoon until nine in the evening, three times weekly, reasoning that free blacks spent "their evenings in improper places, because they [had] no public libraries, no reading rooms, nor useful lectures, to attract [their] attention."[35]

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[30] The National Reformer, January 1839; The Colored American, 10 November 1838.

[31] Walker 77.

[32] Dorothy B. Porter, ed., Early Negro Writing, 1760-1837 (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971) 139.

[33] Walker 74; Graham Russell Hodges, Root & Branch: African Americans in New York & East Jersey, 1613-1863 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999) 243.

[34] Porter, "The Organized Educational Activities of Negro Literary Societies" 567.

[35] Ibid.; Monroe Fordham, Major Themes in Northern Black Religions Thought, 1800-1860 (Hicksville, New York: Exposition Press, 1975) 47.

A year after the Phoenix Society began, Henry H. Garnet and a group of other young black men formed the Garrison Literary and Benevolent Association, also in New York City, serving black males aged four to twenty of "good moral character."[36] Members paid 12 and one-half cents initially, plus one penny weekly.[37] At meetings, they presented works that they had written, usually concerning the abolition of slavery or the importance of education.[38] Over 150 male youth attended these weekly sessions.[39]

David Ruggles, a grocer who also sat on the Executive Committee of the Garrison Literary and Benevolent Association, established a reading room at the office of the New York Vigilance Committee, which he headed.[40] In advertising the opening of his room, he indicated, it supplied "the principal daily and leading anti-slavery papers, and other popular periodicals of the day." In addition, "all [social] classes"

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[36] Porter, "The Organized Educational Activities of Negro Literary Societies" 568, R. J. M. Blackett, Beating Against the Barriers: Biographical Essays in Nineteenth-Century Afro-American History (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1986) 289, Joel Schor, Henry Highland Garnet: A Voice of Black Radicalism in the Nineteenth Century (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977) 11; Daniel Perlman, "Organizations of the Free Negro in New York City," Journal of Negro History 56 (July 1971): 195.

[37] Porter, "The Organized Educational Activities of Negro Literary Societies" 568, Perlman 195.

[38] Porter, "The Organized Educational Activities of Negro Literary Societies" 568, Blackett 289.

[39] Porter, "The Organized Educational Activities of Negro Literary Societies" 568.

[40] The First Annual Report of the New York Committee of Vigilence for the Year 1837, together with important facts relative to their proceedings (Philadelphia, Rhistoric Publications, 1969) 13-14, Porter, "The Organized Educational Activities of Negro Literary Societies" 568; David E. Swift, Black Prophets of Justice: Activist Clergy Before the Civil War (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989) 87, Rhoda Golden Freeman, The Free Negro in New York City in the Era Before the Civil War (New York: Garland Publishers, 1994) 319.

were encouraged to visit his establishment.[41] The Colored American, the nation's leading black newspaper, also attached a reading room to its New York City office. Open daily from eight until four, it carried "the principal Foreign and Domestic papers – Religious, Moral, Literary and Political."[42]

Forming several of their own literary associations, a scholar of early black benevolent societies has maintained, "black women played a key role in literary associations."[43] The first black women's learned society, the Female Literary Association of Philadelphia founded in 1831, consisted of about 20 members who met weekly to discuss their own essays.[44] Many of these women also belonged to the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society and wrote about the injustice of slavery.[45] Other literary organizations existed as well in Philadelphia and New York City where black women read their own original compositions.[46] Since nonreaders often attended, these women read out loud, rather than silently to themselves.[47] They also appealed to

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[41] The Colored American, 16 June 1838.

[42] Ibid. 12 January 1839.

[43] R. Harris, Jr., "Early Black Benevolent Societies" 615.

[44] Porter, "The Organized Educational Activities of Negro Literary Societies" 559.

[45] Julie Winch, "'You Have Talents – Only Cultivate Them,'" The Abolitionist Sisterhood: Women's Political Culture in Antebellum America, eds., Jean Fagan Yellin and John C. Van (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994) 115.

[46] Porter, "The Organized Educational Activities of Negro Literary Societies" 557; Winch, "'You Have Talents – Only Cultivate Them'" 105-06.

[47] McHenry 53-54.

those lacking basic reading and writing skills by memorizing texts, considering it their civic responsibility "as daughters of a despised race" to enlighten those less fortunate.[48] Moreover, through literary associations, these women tried to "break down the strong barrier of prejudice, and raise [them]selves to an equality with those of [their] fellow beings, who differ[ed] from [them] in complexion."[49]

Only the Gilbert Lyceum, started in Philadelphia in 1841, was comprised of both sexes, but another literary club was proposed that was to be all-inclusive, embracing males and females, the young and the old, the educated and the non-educated "without any other qualification than a good character".[50] Dorothy B. Porter has identified nine black literary societies in Philadelphia between 1828 and 1841, but this is probably a conservative estimate. The AMRS cited three black literary societies and three black debating clubs operating in the city during 1837 alone.[51] As one historian has noted, it is remarkable that such a beleaguered and largely nonliterate population should have founded so many learned associations, attesting to their determination to overcome

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[48] Ibid. 53; Linda Perkins, "Black Women and Racial 'Uplift' Prior to Emancipation," ed., Filomina Chioma Steady, Black Women Cross- Culturally Considered (Cambridge, MA: Schenkeman, 1981) 325.

[49] Mia Bay, The White Image in the Black Mind (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) 22.

[50] Wilson 111-12.

[51] Porter, "The Organized Educational Activities of Negro Literary Societies" 557; Minutes and Proceedings of the First Annual Meeting of the Moral Reform Society. 1837. (Philadelphia: Afro-American History Series, Maxwell Whiteman, n.d.) 17.

slavery and racism.[52] All black literary endeavors should be considered in the context that ignorance was regarded as an obstacle to racial progress.

The Banneker Institute (1853-1860)

The Alexanderian Institute, founded in Philadelphia on September 9, 1853, was renamed the Banneker Institute six months later in honor of Benjamin Banneker (1731-1806), the self-taught son of a former slave who was commissioned by President George Washington to plan the construction of Washington, D.C. He also compiled the Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland and Virginia Almanac and Ephemeris, published annually from 1792 to 1802.[53] Banneker, a famous mathematician and astronomer, epitomized what blacks could achieve through education.

The Banneker Institute tried to raise the political awareness of the black community by sponsoring lectures and debates on racial issues. The first question publicly debated was, "Would the downfall of the republic of the United States be beneficial to the interests of the Colored People?"[54] Topics later considered included, "Which class of people have suffered the most in the United States, the Indians or the Colored People?", "Has slavery been beneficial to the African Race?", "Has Africa any claims upon us as a People?", and "Will the effect of the late insurrection at Harper's Ferry be injurious [to colored people]?"[55] In 1858, 12 debates were held; four on the

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[52] Perlman 195.

[53] Banneker Institute Minutes, reel #1 (microfilm), n.d., Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

[54] Ibid. reel #1, 13 August 1854.

[55] Ibid. reel #2, 5 October 1854.

question, "Has the course of [the] Honorable Stephen A. Douglas on the Kansas Nebraska question been consistent?", and two considered, "Is it right for our people to oppose all persons who publicly advocate emigration to Liberia?"[56] A discussion on, "Have the colored people improved in proportion to the advantages they have had?" drew a "very good audience"; and a lecture and debate entitled, "Does the Bible Sanction Slavery? No!" also was delivered before a packed house. In fact, this question was debated twice. A discussion on Canadian emigration also attracted a large crowd.[57] Questions regarding religious themes also were posed, as well as discussions related to "women's rights" and Africa.[58] Debates concerning current issues involved, "Does justice and the public safety require the death penalty in mitigation of capital offences [sic]?", and "Is it necessary to practice deception in businefs [sic]?"[59]

Black literary societies usually tried to find blacks to facilitate debates and serve as speakers. Consequently, although the Banneker Institute used doctors, ministers and other white local leaders, several of their lecturers included black people, such as Sarah M. Douglass, Isaiah C. Wears, Mary Ann Shadd, and Robert Campbell.[60] In addition, Jacob C. White, Sr. spoke on "The Inconsistency of Colored People Using Slave

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[56] Ibid. reel #1, Report of the Recording Secretary, n.d.

[57] Banneker Institute Minutes, reel #1, Secretary's Statement in Regard to the Lectures, Lectures and Debates, 12 February 1856, 26 February 1856, 11 March 1856, 25 March 1856, 6 November 1855.

[58] Ibid. reel #1, 12 January 1859.

[59] Ibid. reel #2, 19 July 1855.

[60] The Colored American, 1 May 1841; Banneker Institute Minutes, reel #1, Secretary's Statement in Regard to the Lectures, 23 October 1855, 20 November 1855, 4 December 1855, 11 March 1856, 25 March 1856, also reel #1, Report of the Secretary, n.d.

Produce"[61] At the Institute's August 1st freedom observance in 1858, William Wells Brown, a former slave and lecturing agent for the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society also gave an "excellent" speech. Wears, a barber, joined him in these remarks: "the celebration of West India Emancipation keeps before the minds of the American people their duty to the millions of slaves upon Southern plantations and coming right in the wake of the 4th of July, gives abolitionists a fine opportunity to expose the hollow-heartedness of American liberty and Christianity."[62]

The Institute also required that its own members deliver public lectures. It reasoned, "we will give encouragement to colored talent, raise our importance in the community, and...aid the funds of the society."[63] However, most members totally neglected this responsibility.[64] In 1856, the agency's president reported that not a single member had lectured before the Institute. Greatly troubled, he maintained that the organization was losing sight of its focus, lacking "unity of purpose." He maintained, "we could more successfully compete with the difficulties with which we [are] surrounded and ultimately arrive at the highest eminence from which Slavery and Social and civil oppression have debarred us", if members only would join together in the diffusion of knowledge.[65]

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[61] Benjamin Quarles, Black Abolitionists (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969) 76.

[62] Bannecker Institute Minutes, reel #2, 13 October 1858; Ripley, ed, vol. 4, 318n-19n.

[63] Bannecker Institute Minutes, reel #2, n.d.

[64] Ibid, reel #1, 12 January 1859 and reel #2, n.d.

[65] Ibid, reel #1, President's Report, 1 May 1856.

To establish a library for club members, individuals also were obliged to present books twice a month on a rotating basis, but merely 13 books were donated in the first 18 months of the Institute's existence.[66] A few years later, a book inventory revealed that members had contributed only eight more books.[67] After black women voluntarily circulated subscriptions to obtain additional works, the Institute eventually acquired over 100 books; and in 1859, another 337 volumes were donated.[68] But, again, most club members made no book contributions. It appears that the plan requiring members to present works "operated well for a time", but was ultimately "altogether abandoned".[69]

Moreover, complained Jacob C. White, Jr., the Institute's secretary and leading member who also sat on its Board of Managers, the agency lacked funds to establish a library because members owed back dues. This problem had been identified in his last three annual reports.[70] Monthly dues were originally 12 and one-half cents, but had been raised to 15 cents to help defray the cost of stationary, the printing of notices, and hall rents.[71] Since the Institute did not meet at the homes of club members, it also paid

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[66] Banneker Institute Minutes; reel #1, Librarian's Report, n.d.

[67] Ibid. reel #1, Librarian's Reports, 5 April 1855, 2 July 1857, and n.d.

[68] Ibid. reel #2, 4 December 1856; reel #1, Report of the Subscription Committee, 2 July 1857; reel #2, n.d.

[69] Ibid. reel #1, Secretary's Report, 3 April 1856.

[70] Ibid.

[71] Ibid. reel #2, n.d.

on average $18.50 for room rent. Additional costs were incurred when space was needed for lectures and other public events. After being notified to pay their back dues, several men were finally expelled in 1856, but the problem still persisted.[72] Some members showed a total disregard for this particular commitment. Shortly after the agency's creation, the Executive Committee asked a member, Mr. Taylor, whether he intended paying his arrears. He stated, "he had done all that he intended to do", and that the Committee "might do with him just whatever [they] felt disposed to do." Consequently, he was expelled from the Institute (and later reinstated.)[73]

The Institute also suffered from extremely poor meeting attendance. As early as 1855, the Institute's president charged that "attendance at meetings ha[d] for a long time been very indifferent", requiring members to wait until a late hour before a quorum of five was present.[74] In 1858, within a six-week period, three debates were cancelled because not enough members attended; and scheduled debates did not take place later that year on two more occasions. Furthermore, in January, February, and March, the members present left before the lecturer arrived. And in 1857, from May through December, members failed to lecture five out of eight times.[75] That same year, debate meetings were "very poorly attended, averaging...about 2": the highest number in attendance at any debate held since May of 1856 was 7. By way of explanation,

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[72] Banneker Institute Minutes, reel #2, n.d. and reel #1, 5 March 1857.

[73] Ibid. reel #1, April 1854.

[74] Ibid. reel #1, President's Report, 1855.

[75] Ibid. reel #2, n.d. and reel #1, Secretary's Report, n.d.

Secretary White noted that several members belonged to another association that also held its meetings on the same nights as the Institute. In addition, the Institute had not adhered to its regular debate schedule.[76] Still, White conceded that there was a "great lack of interest manifested by a large majority" of members that seemed to mirror that of the broader black community.[77]

During 1856 and 1857, only four public lectures were held during the entire lecture season because there were not enough spectators "to warrant any exercises". Sometimes there were "no audiences". Deeming the lectures "impracticable", the Committee on Debates and Lectures recommended their discontinuance.[78] Indeed, the president considered the public lecture season "a failure". He stated, "there appears to be in [the] community a lack of appreciation of literature from what cause I am unable to say." He directed the Committee to find a way of securing adequate audiences without incurring debt.[79] This resulted in the introduction of a ticket system that entitled the ticket holder to a series of ten lectures for 25 cents. A single lecture cost five cents at the door. While it is unclear whether members were expected to serve as lecturers, they were urged to prepare for the debates following each presenter.[80]

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[76] Banneker Institute Minutes, reel #1, Secretary's Report, n.d.

[77] Ibid. reel #1, Secretary's Report, 2 April 1857.

[78] Ibid. reel #1, 4 June 1857.

[79] Ibid. reel #2, President's Report, 2 April 1857.

[80] Ibid. reel #1, 29 October 1857.

At the Institute's 1857 anniversary celebration, 496 tickets issued; 128 were sold at 20 cents apiece and 354 were returned. (Fourteen were given to newspaper reporters and the women's Subscription Committee.) Money received from the event totaled $28.47, but expenses amounted to $24.00 ($4.00 for hall rent, $13.00 for music, and $7.00 for printing handbills), leaving a balance of $4.47.[81] Furthermore, ticket-holders themselves "failed to attend the lectures in sufficient numbers".[82] Even Institute members did not come, and those who were present neglected to fully participate in the evening's events. In highly critical language, the Committee on Debates and Lectures stated, "the number [of members] that took part in any of the discussions was very small thereby showing either their cowardice, lack of interest" or inability to engage in formal discourse.[83]

Still, there was room for some optimism. The Institute reported that public attendance at its 1859 anniversary celebration "was very flattering – the Hall being filled to its utmost capacity, long before the hour appointed." The exercises consisted of speeches, recitations, and music. Members also "acquitted themselves in a manner highly creditable."[84] The Institute's 1859/60 public lecture series likewise was well attended and considered a "pecuniary success". Nonetheless, Secretary White still

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[81] Banneker Institute Minutes, reel #1, Report of the Anniversary Committee, 5 November 1857.

[82] Ibid. reel #1, Report of the Committee on Debates and Lectures, 1 April 1858.

[83] Ibid.

[84] Ibid. reel #1, n.d.

asserted that not enough interest was taken in the lectures by the community or club members.[85]

To address this issue, the Institute formed standing committees on Zoology, Political Economy, Mathematics, History, Music, Chemistry, Statistics, Law, Geology, Ceremonies, and Belles-Lettres; the idea being that if individuals became knowledgeable about a specific subject, they "would not be compelled on special occasions to hurriedly compose something."[86] The Institute also purchased a book that could be used "to obtain facts in the history of great colored men."[87] However, these new measures failed to increase members' attendance.

The real problem was, not enough men joined the Institute. From 1853 to 1860, its membership never exceeded 43. This figure included honorary, corresponding and even deceased members. Other variables also inflated the actual rolls. In April of 1856, although 43 names were listed (an increase of four over the previous year), eight men were expelled for non-attendance or for nonpayment of dues, while 11 others had been notified of "delinquency".[88] In early 1858, 40 names were recorded – 31 active, six honorary, one corresponding, and two deceased. However, 10 of the active members were out of town for extended periods, reducing the number of actual participants to

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[85] Bannecker Institute Minutes, reel #2, n.d.

[86] Ibid. reel #2, 9 March 1859 and n.d.

[87] Ibid. reel #2, n.d.

[88] Ibid. reel #1, 5 April 1855, 3 April 1856, 5 March 1857, and reel #2, n.d.

just over 20.[89] And again, in January of 1859, 43 names appeared on the roll – 28 active, eight honorary, four corresponding and three deceased. While eight new members had been admitted over the past year (three active, two honorary and three corresponding), three men had been expelled and two had resigned. In fact, in 1858, the average attendance at bi-monthly meetings (including lectures and debates) was only 8.8.[90] Another report indicated that annual attendance for the year's meetings and events (which totaled 60) averaged merely 6.9.[91]

Literature and "The Elite"

Clearly, the Institute never became the viable institution that its founders had envisioned. Disturbed by the black community's overall lack of involvement in literary societies, a reformer wrote in 1840:

> The same men, or class of men, who were actively engaged ten years ago, in striving to give our people a literary character, are engaged in the same laudable work now; the numbers are also about the same. Those few who form the exceptions, have to bear the burden of all literary efforts and enterprises.[92]

Only a small, core group seemed committed to the success of literary associations, although free blacks generally demonstrated interest in education, attending Sabbath and evening schools in large numbers. Still, the vast majority could not see the clear benefits of literary training. Even a reformer conceded, "a mere

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[89] Banneker Institute Minutes, reel #1, Secretary's Report, n.d.

[90] Ibid., reel #1, Secretary's Report, 1858.

[91] Ibid. reel #2, 12 January 1859.

[92] The Colored American, 16 May 1840.

knowledge of books, without a trade of some kind, is useless, as the colored people are situated now. I have spent all my life in educating my head, and the brightest prospect I have today for the future...is to sail for Monrovia on the coast of Africa..."[93] Finding themselves in the untenable position of trying to justify the value of higher education, some reformers denied that classical learning was the goal of black education.

> Very mistaken views of this subject are entertained by many of our people; when it is said, educate your children, they imagine it is meant, they should teach them Latin, Greek and Hebrew; and carry them through the whole routine of collegiate courses. This is not the case.

Instead, black youth should be taught "the mother tongue correctly" and given "general, practical, and useful knowledge of the arts and sciences."[94] In an attempt to make literary associations more responsive to the needs of ordinary people, another reformer recommended that lectures be given "upon the most useful and practical branches of education, of menial labor, of the mechanical arts, and [of] all subjects of actual and practical utility to our people." He also urged that libraries attached to literary associations be "exactly adapted to the wants of members", inferring that they generally contained books of interest to just a privileged few.[95]

Indeed, black literary associations were widely perceived as elite organizations, as this 1830 commentary indicated.

> There is, unfortunately, an exclusiveness about those associations which deters the stranger from making efforts to gain admission into them; they are more like literary clubs than the public Societies; consequently their

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[93] Ripley, ed. vol. 4, 297.

[94] The Colored American, 4 March 1837.

[95] Frederick Douglass Paper, 25 March 1853; The Colored American, 6 March 1841.

> numbers must necessarily be few, and confined to the personal friends, and acquaintances of the members. They are, however, of great importance; in their own immediate sphere they are an essential benefit, and they have also great influence on the public, but they are not public institutions. We need a literary institution which will be in all its bearing, essentially public...[96]

Despite their reputation for being private associations, black literary societies actually had few qualifications. Most only required that prospective members be at least 18 years of age* and of "good moral character". However, since existing members usually recommended candidates, relatives and friends tended to belong to the same associations.[97] In addition, admission fees typically ran about 50 cents and although efforts were made to keep costs within reach of poorer blacks, many of them could not afford even minimal expenses.[98]

Moreover, most free blacks probably assumed that there was an educational requirement, even if this condition was not always made explicit. The Banneker Institute, in fact, stipulated that members demonstrate "ordinary literary attainments", implying some degree of literacy, while it is likely that the free black majority had acquired only a few years of basic schooling.[99] Indeed, historians James and Lois

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[96] The Colored American, 5 October 1839.

* The Banneker Institute accepted members at 19, later changing the age limit to 21. Men could also become corresponding and honorary members by a majority vote.

[97] Emma Jones Lapsansky. "'Discipline to the Mind': Philadelphia's Banneker Institute, 1854-1872," eds.. Darlene Clark Hine and Earnestine Jenkins. A Question of Manhood: A Reader in U.S. Black Men's History and Masculinity (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999) 407.

[98] The Colored American, 10 November 1838; Bannker Institute Minutes, reel #2, n.d.

[99] Banneker Institute Minutes, reel #2, n.d.; Gilkeson 78; George A. Levesque, "Boston's Black Brahmin: Dr. John S. Rock," Civil War History 26 (Dec. 1980): 328; Hortons, Black Bostonians 39; Freeman 235.

Horton have pointed out that while most free blacks in Massachusetts were classified as literate according to the 1850 census, literacy in the mid-nineteenth century only may have meant minimal reading and writing ability.[100] Another authority on early black education in New York State has indicated that most antebellum African Americans were nonliterate, although they could "count well enough to handle money."[101] Similarly, a black reformer once asserted that free blacks generally possessed only "a smattering of spelling and arithmetic and a halting ability to read."[102]

Some black literary societies did try to accommodate beginning readers, yet there is no indication that the Institute did so, and at least one individual may have felt that he lacked sufficient education as a club member.[103] In 1858, A. W. Campbell stepped down from his position on the Committee on Debates and Lectures, stating "finding my qualifications inadequate to the duties of the office to which you so kindly elected [me]... I am compeled [sic] to offer you my resignation. Not that I am unwilling to serve you but as I have already said, my qualifications are inadequate to the duties."[104] A number of other members perhaps shared his views, which would account for their poor showing as lecturers before the Institute.

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[100] Horton, Black Bostonians 166.

[101] Mabee, Black Education in New York State 15.

[102] Swift, Black Prophets of Justice 212.

[103] McHenry 50.

[104] Banneker Institute Minutes, reel #1, Resignation of Mr. A. W. Campbell from Committee on Debates and Lectures, 1 April 1858.

When the agency finally conducted an investigation as to "the causes of the Literary apathy" among members, it reached the following conclusion:

> ...although we propose to promote Literature, yet the very day necessities of a plurality of our members are such as to practically alienate them from the habits and necessities of Literary men...If any of the elements of Literature became immediate and regular necessities towards the acquisition of our most nesscessary [sic] wants, the daily bread and butter, that these results would find in no small degree to change the character and effectiveness of the Institute... Certainly we who from daily fatigue and exhaustion produced by the more frequent exercise of our physical, than the intellectual nature cannot expect, in keeping with the laws of nature to make much more than a decent resemblance to a Literary Society, having for its objects the promotion of Literature and Science.[105]

Apparently, most members of the Banneker Institute were common laborers with limited time to pursue literature. A reformer explained: "their labors are such [that] they must be kept steadily to work, and when six o'clock comes they cannot leave off, like other young men engaged in mechanical employment, ...[who] have time at their disposal."[106]

Of course, not all men associated with the Institute were unskilled workers. Robert Campbell was a teacher, as well as a printer, who promoted adult education and gave evening science lectures before the black community.[107] Jacob C. White, Jr. was a graduate of the Institute for Colored Youth (a local training college for black teachers) where he taught math for seven years. The son of a wealthy businessman and abolitionist leader, White. Jr., like his father, also operated several businesses, and he

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[105] Banneker Institute Minutes, reel #2, n.d.

[106] The National Reformer, 1 April 1839.

[107] Ripley, ed. vol. 4, 354.

eventually became Philadelphia's foremost black educator.[108] Joseph C. Bustill, another teacher and son of an abolitionist, also had attended private school. He ultimately assisted more than 1000 fugitive slaves during the mid-1800s as an agent for the Underground Railroad.[109] And George E. Stephens, son of free blacks from Virginia, helped found the Banneker Institute. He worked variously as a cabinetmaker, carpenter and laborer for the U.S. Coast Survey.[110] These men were among the Institute's organizers, unlike the rank and file who probably were less educated, but who still shared literary interests with agency administrators. The main point is that most members of the Banneker Institute were common laborers and this working class element may have been typical of most black literary organizations.

There also was not a complete disconnect between the Institute and the broader black community. As we have seen, black Philadelphians responded favorably to debates and lectures on topics directly related to their interests, and there are indications that many free blacks attended the Institute's annual festivities. In 1858, about 350 people were present at its August 1st celebration commemorating the abolition of slavery in the British West Indies.[111] Nonetheless, it seems that free blacks rarely joined literary societies. While basic reading and writing skills had practical application, it was very difficult for a poor and barely literate population to see the

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[108] Ripley, ed., vol. 4, 138n.

[109] Ibid., vol. 4, 333-34n.

[110] Ibid. vol. 4, 374-75.

[111] Banneker Institute Minutes, reel #2, 13 October 1858.

tangible benefit of belonging to organizations that promoted knowledge of geography, philosophy, and classical languages.

Conclusion

Currently, historians tie improvement in literature to "bourgeois respectability", inferring that free blacks joined literary clubs to gain "middle-class" standing. This reasoning overlooks the very real possibility that they genuinely sought to learn more about the world through these agencies. Indeed, literature that treats education as a "middle-class" aspiration often misses the political intent of black literary associations. Historiography that links improvement in literature to "bourgeois respectability" also tends to pit "middle-class" reformers against the rest of the community. Yet, the social composition of the Banneker Institute plainly illustrates that social class position does not totally determine intellectual outlook, particularly among those who used education as a political instrument[112]. In brief, black literary associations reflected a tradition of social activism through education and should be considered in this context. Since organizers of these agencies truly believed that free blacks could rise to the level of their superiors through study, their purpose was political, as well as literary.

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[112] Robert K. Merton, "The Lesson of Ethnicity," ed. Werner Sollors, Theories of Ethnicity: A Classical Reader (Washington Square, NY: New York University Press, 1996) 342-44.

CHAPTER 3

"UNLETTERED CLERGY": THE PUSH FOR AN EDUCATED MINISTRY IN THE AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH

The black church was the largest and most influential organizations among African Americans by the early nineteenth century. As the mainstay of free black society, it offered a host of social services to the community, including recreational activities, educational opportunities, and financial resources for the sick and the needy. It also provided the political base for an anti-slavery ministry, clearly linking black religious life to political activity.[1] Using religion to justify an end to slavery, black clerics drafted legislative petitions, attended politically oriented state and national conventions, sponsored public lectures and addresses, and supported the abolitionist press. They also led boycotts of segregated facilities, organized vigilance committees, and participated in the Underground Railroad.[2] In fact, all of the eight free blacks who helped establish the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society in 1840 were ministers

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[1] James Horton, Free People of Color: Inside the African American Community (Washington Smithsonian Press, 1993) 34; Herman Edward Thomas, James W. C. Pennington: African American Churchman and Abolitionist (New York: Garland Publishers, 1995) 171; Graham Russell Hodges, Root & Branch: African Americans in New York & East Jersey, 1613-1863 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999) 252; Henry Reed, Platform for Change: The Foundations of the Northern Free Black Community, 1775-1865 (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1994) 47; Rhoda Golden Freeman, The Free Negro in New York City in the Era Before the Civil War (New York: Garland Publishers, 1994) 299.

[2] Carter G. Woodson, The History of the Negro Church (Washington: Associated Publishers, 1972) 148-50; Robert C. Dick, Black Protest: Issues and Tactics (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1974) 4; Benjamin Quarles, Black Abolitionists (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969) 81-84; David E. Swift, Black Prophets of Justice: Activist Clergy Before the Civil War (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989) 7, 9, 11, 78, 128.

hailing from Philadelphia, New Haven, and New York City.[3] While it should be noted that most black ministers were not abolitionists, black clergymen nonetheless were in the vanguard of anti-slavery activism.[4]

They also led the way in promoting education.[5] Virtually all black clerical abolitionists advocated formal ministerial training, believing that black people were judged by the quality of their ministry, and that their moral and political elevation depended upon an educated clergy.[6] They even saw education as a spiritual necessity, maintaining that God commanded research and study.[7] Above all, they did not want the masses guided by uneducated preachers who, apart from slaveholders, were considered the "most serious obstacle" to the intellectual development of black people.[8]

At the same time, a broader national trend was underway to establish an educated ministry, resulting in the formation of 37 theological schools founded roughly

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[3] Quarles, Black Abolitionists 68.

[4] Carleton Mabee, Black Freedom: The Nonviolent Abolitionists from 1830 through the Civil War (New York: MacMillan, 1970) 136; Gerald Sorin, Abolitionism: A New Perspective (NY: Praeger, 1972) 101.

[5] Carelton Mabee, Black Education in New York State from Colonial to Modern Times (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1979) 136.

[6] The Colored American, 16 September 1837.

[7] The Christian Recorder, 2 August 1862; 14 February 1863.

[8] William Watkins, letter to Samuel E. Cornish, June 8, 1837, ed. Ripley, The Black Abolitionist Papers vol. 3, 233; The North Star, 7 April 1848. See also Mary Ann Shadd Cary, letter to Frederick Douglass, 25 January 1849, vol. 4, 32.

between 1840 and 1870.[9] Yet, even prior to this period, most colleges were essentially religious institutions where specialized Christian study was required of all students. A number of leading schools (like Harvard and Yale) also had graduate theological departments.[10]

The Dutch Reformed Church established the first independent school devoted exclusively to ministerial education in 1784, and seven years later Roman Catholics in Baltimore founded another seminary. However, most seminaries were created after 1800, when colleges began placing emphasis on the physical sciences, while study of the classics and theology declined.[11] Various Protestant faiths also began formal sectarian training to promote denominational loyalty and to discourage heterodox tendencies. But the religious revivals of the early nineteenth century are what really galvanized efforts to improve the quality of the clergy. Churches needed qualified ministers and missionaries to instruct thousands of Americans converted to Protestantism during camp meetings.[12] Consequently, all leading denominations (excluding Methodists)* founded seminaries before 1820 – the Moravians and

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[9] William Adams Brown, The Education of American Ministers, Ministerial Education in America, 4 vols. (New York: Institute of Social and Religious Research, 1934), vol. 1, 79.

[10] Ibid. vol. 1, 66, 68.

[11] Ibid. vol. 1, 68, 76.

[12] Ibid. vol. 1, 42, 74, 78, 89; Robert H. Abzug, Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994) 117; W. A. Daniel, The Education of Negro Ministers (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1925) 28.

* The first Methodist seminary was founded in Newbury, Vermont in 1841.

Congregationalists (1807), the Presbyterians (1808-1812), and the Episcopalians and Baptists (1817).[13]

Seminary students were expected to have prior college training or demonstrate some knowledge of classical languages, science, rhetoric, geography, astronomy and belles lettres.[14] Yet, evangelicalism also fostered a strain of anti-intellectualism, with Baptists and Methodists being the most inimical to clerical education.[15] These faiths only required that ministers be "called" to preach through the Holy Spirit.[16] Methodists also depended heavily on an itinerant ministry to spread the word of God among potential converts living in frontier communities.[17] By 1839, they had employed over 3,000 of these itinerant preachers who possessed little or no formal theological training.[18]

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[13] Brown vol. 1, 75-77, George M. Apperson, African Americans on the Tennessee Frontier – John Gloucester & His Contemporaries, n. p., Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia.

[14] Apperson, n.p.; Henry Caswell, America and the American Church (London, 1839) 129.

[15] Ronald G. Walters, American Reformers, 1815-1860 (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978) 24; Frank Glenn Lankard, A History of the American Sunday School Curriculum (New York: Abingdon, 1927) 131; Thomas Walter Laquer, Religion and Respectability: Sunday Schools & Working Class Culture, 1780-1850 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1976) 133; John F. Watson, Annals of Philadelphia and Pennsylvania in the Olden Time; Being a Collection of Memoirs, Anecdotes & Incidents of the City and Its Inhabitants, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, 1845), vol. 1, 459; Swift, Black Prophets of Justice 79; Abzug 117; Thomas L. Nichols, Forty Years of American Life, 2 vols. (London, 1864), vol. 1, 371; Brown vol. 1, 37.71.

[16] Brown vol. 1, 72; Methodist Episcopal Records, Quarterly Conference Minutes, 1832-38, New York Public Library, New York City; Watson vol. 2, 459.

[17] Brown vol. 1, 71-72, 80-81; Woodson, The History of the Negro Church 84; Watson vol. 1, 459.

[18] Caswell 316.

This system of "circuit riders" proved to be a very effective means of acquiring parishioners. In 1802, while only 87,000 adults adhered to Methodism, over 640,000 people had converted some 30 years later. Methodism appealed especially to lower-class Americans because it did not require knowledge of the catechism before baptism.[19] The straightforward speaking style of its preachers coupled with its doctrine of universal salvation also led to a dramatic rise in Methodist church membership, particularly among African Americans. As early as 1816, they represented about one fourth of the American Methodist church, and by 1840, as many as 286 black Methodist churches existed in the North (as compared to 17 Baptist, six Episcopal, three Presbyterian and Congregational, and one Lutheran).[20] Yet, rapid black conversion to a denomination that lacked a tradition of ministerial education posed a serious problem for the black moral reform movement with its emphasis on formal schooling.

The Controversy Over an Educated Clergy

The clergy provided one of the few opportunities for leadership available to black men in their communities. Consequently, black ministers often assumed a number of secular responsibilities, acting not only as spiritual figures, but also serving the economic and social interests of their parishioners, providing them with guidance in educational, financial and even personal matters.[21] Noting the complex function of

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[19] Carrol Smith Rosenberg, Religion and the Rise of the American City, the New York City Movement, 1812-1870 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1971) 46-47.

[20] Daniel 21; Monroe Fordham, Major Themes in Black Religious Thought, 18800-1860 (Hicksville, NY: Exposition Press, 1975) 30.

[21] Daniel 29.

black preachers, W. E. B. DuBois once variously described them as leaders, politicians, orators, "bosses", schemers and idealists.[22] These multiple roles gave them tremendous influence.

Black communities also tended toward a high rate of church membership. While it is difficult to pinpoint precise figures, free blacks in New York City founded ten churches (four Methodist, three Episcopal, two Baptist, and one Presbyterian) before 1826.[23] Likewise, sources indicate that black Philadelphians had seven congregations as early as 1813, with a combined total of 2,366 members.[24] By the onset of the Civil War, 19 black churches existed in Philadelphia and 13 in New York.[25]

These figures suggest that black ministers enjoyed considerable standing in their communities. Several interrelated factors determined their prestige, including the nature of their community activism, whether or not they possessed a favorable reputation, and the size of their respective congregations. It should be stressed that the social position of the black ministerial class was not based on income. Often, black clergymen assumed secular employment to supplement their meager earnings and local African Methodist Episcopal Church (AMEC) preachers, in particular, frequently

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[22] W. E. B. DuBois, The Souls of Black Folk 190-191.

[23] Leslie Marie Harris, "Creating the African American Working Class: Black and White Workers, Abolitionists and Reformers in New York City, 1785-1863." Diss. Stanford University, 1995.

[24] Gary B. Nash, Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988) 202; DuBois, The Philadelphia Negro, 199.

[25] Mabee, Black Freedom, 133; Theodore Hershburg, "Free Blacks in Antebellum Philadelphia: A Study of Ex-Slaves, Freeborn, & Socioeconomic Decline," Journal of Social History 2 (Winter 1971-72): 183.

performed the same work as their parishioners.[26] So precarious was their financial condition that AMEC officials once refused to send a cleric to Boston unless the city's congregation agreed to support him. The diocese eventually responded that they were "prepared to sustain a preacher, or at least give him the sum of seventy-five dollars."[27] On another occasion, AMEC leaders requested that a poor itinerant preacher be assigned to a circuit where "he might make some money" performing wedding ceremonies.[28]

The salaries of black Congregational and Presbyterian ministers were equally uncertain since they were prohibited from taking outside employment, making them solely dependent on their congregants (or Church trustees) for financial support.[29] Even Episcopalians (who presumably served more affluent parishioners) complained of their "scanty pittance".[30] In contrast, it was reported, "the average stipend for a [white] Episcopalian clergymen, exclusive of presents [was] not far from $600, it [was] seldom below 400, and in the large towns and cities it varie[d] from $1500 to $3500", well

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[26] George, Carol V. R. "Widening the Circle, the Black Church and the Abolitionist Crusade, 1830-1860," eds. Lewis Perry and Michael Fellman, Antislavery Reconsidered: New Perspectives on the Abolitionists (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana University Press, 1979) 85; Woodson, The History of the Negro Church 146; Freeman 299.

[27] Daniel A. Payne, History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (Nashville, TN: Publishing House of the AME Sunday-School Union, 1891) 120.

[28] Payne, History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church 156.

[29] Swift, Black Prophets of Justice 17, 21, 340.

[30] Hodges 239.

above middle-class income.[31] Unlike black ministers who relied heavily upon small contributions from their congregants, many white clergymen were compensated through large endowments and pew-rents, providing most of them, especially in the eastern states, with a comfortable existence.[32]

Most black ministers were uneducated. Although some of them had taken advanced courses at white charity schools or under the direction of church officials, most trained under older ministers who had been "called" to God during late adolescence or early adulthood.[33] These preachers who typically had no formal education still held considerable sway over their congregations.[34] Even ministers of smaller churches and itinerant preachers helped set the moral and cultural tone of their parishioners. They were uniquely positioned to raise their intellectual standards. A reformer explained:

> ...among every class of people, it is necessary that the ministry should be distinguished for learning; and especially among the people of color, who have heretofore been excluded from other learned professions... upon them depends, in a peculiar manner, the character of our people for intelligence.[35]

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[31] Caswell 306.

[32] Ibid. 302-303, 305-307.

[33] Brown vol. 1, 65; Sorin 101; Frederick Douglass, letter to Harriet Beecher Stowe, 8 March, 1853, Frederick Douglass Paper, 2 December 1853.

[34] George, "Widening the Circle" 79, 81, 85; Payne, History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church 256.

[35] The Colored American, 16 September 1837.

Reformers believed that black ministers could raise the social consciousness of their congregations, acting as catalysts for antislavery activism, if they took the lead in education.

Abolitionists sometimes criticized black clerics for not systematically using their churches to denounce slavery and racism.[36] Historians, themselves, are somewhat divided on the question as to whether many northern black churches actively supported abolition, especially given the pro-slavery stance of most major denominations.[37] The AMEC especially failed to openly condemn slavery because it held a large southern contingency.[38] Although the Church did exclude slaveholders from its membership, it generally avoided expressing strong antislavery sentiment for fear that a more active role in the abolitionist movement would endanger southern black ministers and lead to the closure of southern black churches.[39]

Historian David E. Swift has contended that most black clerical abolitionists were either Presbyterian or Congregationalist, denominations that inherited their tradition of political activism (and ministerial education) from Puritanism.[40] But he concedes that black Baptists, particularly in Boston, routinely denounced slavery from

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[36] Swift, Black Prophets of Justice 200; Mabee, Black Freedom 136.

[37] Sorin 102.

[38] Swift, Black Prophets of Justice 123; George, "Widening the Circle", 89.

[39] Carol, "Widening the Circle", 90, Quarles, Black Abolitionists 82.

[40] Swift, Black Prophets of Justice 1.

the pulpit.[41] Julie Winch also found that all but three black churches in antebellum Philadelphia hosted anti-slavery lecturers, while Benjamin Quarles has maintained, "most Northern congregations and their pastors made no effort to conceal their decidedly anti-slavery sentiments."[42] Many historians agree that, with few exceptions, black clergy regularly spoke out against slavery and discrimination, although many of them were not formally connected to abolitionism.[43]

Moreover, clerics who promoted abolition also tended to support education, and an intense, often acrimonious, campaign was underway by the late 1830s to raise the educational standards of black clergy through formal training in theology, geography, history, literature, logic and rhetoric.[44] At the very least, reformers believed that all black ministers (including exhorters and traveling preachers) should have a common school education and "KNOW HOW TO READ..."[45] Clergymen also were urged to use correct grammar and proper sentence structure in their sermons, imparting secular,

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[41] Swift, Black Prophets of Justice 5.

[42] Julie P. Winch, Philadelphia's Black Elite: Activism, Accommodation, and the Struggle for Autonomy, 1787-1848 (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988) 157; Quarles, Black Abolitionists 82.

[43] Quarles, Black Abolitionists 82-84; Woodson, The History of the Negro Church 148-49; Hodges 252; Reed 47; Freeman 299; Swift, Black Prophets of Justice 6.

[44] The Christian Recorder, 21 February 1863, 18 April 1863, and 30 May 1863.

[45] The Christian Recorder, 21 February 1863.

as well as spiritual knowledge to parishioners.[46] Essentially, they were expected to act as teachers as well as preachers.[47]

Yet, practical considerations hindered the development of an educated clergy. Most free blacks could not afford to attend colleges or seminaries and almost all blacks were denied access to these institutions.[48] Reformers also faulted the policies of the broader Church connection for its failure to encourage black ministerial education.[49] They maintained, the Methodist Episcopal Church "told us that if the Lord called us to preach, he would put words in our mouths, and we were told to look only to Heaven and get knowledge, while white preachers were looking all the time in the book."[50] In fact, in all of the major denominations, only a few black clergymen received a classical education, while the church often paid for white ministers to obtain a thorough course of training.[51]

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[46] Swift, Black Prophets of Justice 217.

[47] Foner, Philip S. and George E. Walker, eds., Proceedings of the Black State Conventions, 1840-1865, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1979) vol. 2, 23; The North Star, 7 April 1848; The Christian Recorder, 31 August 1861, 31 January 1863, 21 February 1863; ed. Peter C. Ripley, The Black Abolitionist Papers, 5 vols. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1986) vol. 3, 233.

[48] The Frederick Douglass Paper, 2 December 1853; Swift, Black Prophets of Justice 100; Alexander Crummel, The Shades and the Lights of a Fifty Years Ministry, 1844-1894; Jubilate; a sermon by Alex. Crummel, rector, and a presentation address by Mrs. A. J. Cooper, n.d., Woodruff Library, Emory University, Special Collections, 6.

[49] William Watkins, letter to Samuel E. Cornish, June 8, 1837, ed. Ripley, vol. 3, 233.

[50] The Christian Recorder, 31 May 1862.

[51] The National Era, 12 August 1852.

White church officials sometimes did allow black preachers to forgo the qualifications usually demanded of candidates for the ministry, but reformers advised free blacks to reject licenses to preach granted under these conditions. They warned that circumventing normal clerical training would make black preachers only "HALF MEN" and "perpetuate the distinctions of society, rather than to elevate their brethren and level the community."[52]

However, not all clergymen believed that the new educational standards had an equalizing tendency. One uneducated minister who had been forced to work since his early youth felt that the newfound preference for learned preachers showed "a great deal of prejudice existing between those that have been left to liberty all their days, against those that have been in slavery." His resentment of attacks on his ministerial credentials prompted him to question the whole value of moral improvement.[53] Yet, opposition to an educated ministry usually was not expressed in terms of class differences. More typically, opponents objected solely on the basis of religion, insisting that book learning actually diminished religiosity.[54]

Supporters of this view firmly believed that only conversion and calling experiences truly qualified individuals to preach. They often pointed to the successes of uneducated black clerics, like Harry Hosier (the traveling companion of Bishop Asbury) or Shadrach Green (a slave born Kentuckian), who were well known for their brilliant

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[52] The National Era, 12 August 1852.

[53] The Christian Recorder, 25 April 1863.

[54] "A Colored American", letter to Samuel E. Cornish, 2 August 1837, ed. Ripley, vol. 3, 234; The North Star, 7 April 1848.

sermons.[55] Like most black ministers without formal theological training, these men relied heavily on their style of delivery to influence congregations. Their gift for converting scores of nonbelievers to Protestantism through oratory, prophesies, or strange visions presumably proved that they were moved to preach by the Holy Spirit. Educated ministers who did not experience divine revelations were often viewed as lacking "true religion".

The "enemies of education" were especially critical of prepared sermons, which they believed lent an artificial air to religious services. They labeled preachers who read their sermons from the pulpit "idolaters", dependent upon "a little paper god". One minister likened their actions to a lawyer who, while in the midst of trying to convince a jury to spare the life of a client, proceeded to "pull an essay out of his pocket..."[56] These clerics firmly believed that all ministers should speak extemporaneously, that "the pulpit ought not smell too much of theology", which in their opinion signaled pretense and vanity.[57] Another advocate of "preaching instead of reading" stated:

> Let every preacher become as conversant with Scripture, as he is with the alphabet...aiming at no display, but seeking only salvation of souls, let him address his audience in a manner natural to himself, relying on God for his influence and illumination, and if he cannot preach in this way, without the aid of writing, I do not believe he is called to preach at all.[58]

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[55] Speech of Charles W. Gardner, 9 May 1837, ed. Ripley, vol. 3, 209-10; Watson vol. 1, 459.

[56] William Watkins to Samuel E. Cornish, 8 June 1837, ed. Ripley, vol. 3, 234; The Christian Recorder, 2 October 1854.

[57] The Christian Recorder, 2 October 1854.

[58] The Colored American, 9 January 1841.

Many unlettered ministers believed that the whole point of sermons was to appeal to sentiment and emotion; that a passionate uneducated preacher was more effective as a speaker than an educated minister who lacked religious ardor.[59] Still, reformers insisted that a cleric should have religious training before delivering a sermon, and not simply "open his mouth expecting God to fill it".[60]

Uneducated ministers were often criticized in the most disparaging language, called "ignorant and stupid" and a "disgrace to their profession" for their alleged inability to read and interpret Scriptures.[61] Clergymen who repeated platitudes or set-phrases in a deliberate attempt to incite their audiences especially irritated reformers.[62] A minister who attended a church service once reported that the preacher said "glory to God" at least 178 times in less than an hour.[63]

One can easily point to the class implications of the reform push for an educated ministry for the plan clearly threatened the standing of unlettered clergy who comprised the majority of the black ministry. However, reform was not intended to accentuate class differences based on literacy, but to elevate educational requirements for all black

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[59] Carter G. Woodson, Negro Orators and Their Orations (New York: Russell & Russell, 1969) 3; The Christian Recorder, 2 October 1854.

[60] The Christian Recorder, 31 January 1863.

[61] Ibid.

[62] William Watkins to Samuel E. Cornish, June 8, 1837, ed. Ripley, vol. 3, 233-34; The Christian Recorder, 31 January 1863, 21 February 21 1863.

[63] The Christian Recorder, 7 September 1861.

clergy so that they could compete with white ministers on more equal footing.[64] One reformer expressed their reasoning: "our white brethren are making great efforts to raise the standard of education among their clergy – let us, whose necessities are greater, strive to make ours their equals", especially since God intended black ministers "to be the leaders of the people."[65]

Daniel A. Payne and the African Methodist Episcopal Church

Daniel Alexander Payne was the nineteenth century's foremost proponent of a learned clergy. In 1843, he introduced a series of formal letters entitled "Epistles on the Education of the Ministry" outlining a required course of study for the AMEC ministry.[66] These epistles provoked such intense opposition that they threatened to rent the Church.[67] Payne also emphasized more "progressive" forms of religious worship, such as making choirs and organs a permanent feature of church services. This policy likewise made Payne so unpopular among his congregants that an "infuriated woman" once physically attacked him.[68] In fact, in 1848, when Payne was appointed pastor of the Ebenezer Church in Baltimore, his prospective parishioners called a meeting to reject him as their minister. Payne recalled: "they said …I had too fine a carpet on my

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[64] The Colored American, 22 June 1839.

[65] The Colored American, 16 September 1837; The Christian Recorder, 2 November 1861.

[66] Bishop Daniel Alexander Payne, Recollections of Seventy Years. 1888. (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1968) 75-76, 221.

[67] Ibid. 75-76, 221.

[68] Ibid. 92.

floor, and was too proud; that if one of the members should ask me to take tea with them, I would not; and lastly, that I would not let them sing their 'spiritual songs'".[69] Although Payne denied treating church members with condescension, his references to their "ignorant" and "ridiculous" religious practices suggest a patronizing and unyielding manner that would not have endeared him to parishioners. Ultimately, he voluntarily transferred to another jurisdiction where he continued to work for ministerial education.

Payne was born of free parents in Charleston, South Carolina in 1811. He learned the alphabet from his father when he was eight. After his parents died, he was placed in a two-year school for orphaned and indigent black children where he continued his studies until meeting Thomas S. Bonneau, a popular schoolteacher, who instructed Payne for three more years.[70] He eventually established his own school in 1829, but South Carolina soon banned the teaching of African Americans and forced it to close.[71]

Determined to broaden his education, Payne recounted that one day he bought a dictionary, a Greek grammar book, and a Greek testament. Within two days, he maintains that he had mastered the Greek alphabet, translating the first chapter of Matthew's gospel from Greek into English, from Greek into Latin, and from Greek into

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[69] Payne, Recollections of Seventy Years, 93-94.

[70] Ibid. 11, 14-15, 19.

[71] Payne, Recollections of Seventy Years 19; ed., Ripley vol. 4, 198n.

French.[72] At this point, Payne also became interested in geography, chemistry, philosophy, history, astronomy and botany.[73] He eventually earned his theology degree from the Lutheran Seminary in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania (one of the few seminaries in the United States that accepted black applicants for the ministry.)[74]

Although Payne was drawn to the teachings of the AMEC, a colleague warned him of the Church's hostility to an educated ministry, indicating that it was commonplace for preachers to begin their sermons by declaring, "they had not rubbed their heads against college-walls, at which the people would cry, 'Amen!'; they had never studied Latin or Greek, at which the people would exclaim, 'Glory to God!'; they had never studied Hebrew, at which all would 'shout.'"[75] Nonetheless, some church leaders did favor an educated clergy, and Payne rose rapidly within the ranks of the AMEC.[76] Just over ten years after being received on trial as a local preacher, he was designated the church's official historian and ordained bishop.[77]

Payne's "Epistles on the Education of the Ministy" (written between June 1843 and May 1844) were not the first proposals on education advanced by the AMEC.

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[72] Payne, Recollections of Seventy Years 22.

[73] Ibid. 20-23.

[74] Ibid. 59.

[75] Ibid. 64.

[76] Ibid. 76.

[77] Ibid. 1, 74, 108; Payne, History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, 221; William J. Simmons, Men of Mark; Eminent, Progressive & Rising (New York: Arno Press, 1968) 1084.

According to Payne, the issue of common and Sunday school education was originally raised at the denomination's Ohio Annual Conference* in 1833, although another source indicates that ministers were directed to "preach expressly on education" as early as 1817.[78] It took 25 years before the AMEC, at its Baltimore Conference, passed a non-binding resolution recommending that all its ministers study: "English grammar, geography, arithmetic, history, modern history, ecclesiastical history, [and] natural and revealed theology."[79] But the real struggle over an educated clergy was just beginning.

On April 22, 1843, when AMEC ministers again gathered at their annual meeting in Baltimore, they appointed a committee of four (including Payne) to determine whether three licentiates were qualified to become deacons. After an examination, three members of the committee favored ordination, but Payne opposed their application on the grounds that they lacked sufficient knowledge of the Discipline (the Methodist rule book), which then primarily involved an understanding of the development, teachings and polity of the Church.[80] When the two reports were

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* By 1846, the AMEC was divided into six districts: Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York, Ohio, Indiana and Canada. Each district held an Annual Conference among its local ministers, and each church held a Quarterly Conference to transact its own business. Every fourth year a General Conference was held, comprised of delegations from each district, for the purpose of making Church rules and regulations. The General Conference had power over the Annual Conference, which had to submit its proceedings to the General Conference for approval. The first AMEC General Conference was held in 1816; the first Annual Conference was held in Baltimore in 1818.

[78] Payne, History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church 154, 394; Daniel A Payne, The Semi-Centenary and the Retrospection of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (Baltimore, 1866) 29; The Doctrines and Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (Philadelphia, 1817) 91.

[79] Payne, History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, 395.

[80] Payne, The Semi-Centenary 48; Payne, History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church 156.

presented to the convention, Payne's written remarks sparked heated debate on the merits of education. As soon as his report was read, Reverend R. Collins "sprang to his feet" denouncing formal clerical training. Speaking at length, he "violently demanded whether [the AMEC] wanted a man to know how to read Hebrew, Greek and Latin before [it] would ordain him."[81] Still, Payne's minority report was adopted overwhelmingly, perhaps because the presiding Bishop, Morris Brown, refused to ordain the candidates in light of Payne's reservations.[82] The conference again prescribed a course of study (including English grammar, ancient and ecclesiastical history, theology and geography) to be presented for approval at the next AMEC general meeting. Meanwhile, both New York and Philadelphia conferences adopted similar measures.[83]

By the time the General Conference convened in May of 1844, opposition against mandatory clerical training had gained momentum. Payne, now the focus of attention, was branded a "devil" for his publication of the five "Epistles" and charged with besmirching the Church's reputation. Indeed, the hostility directed toward him prompted the editor of the African Methodist Episcopal Church Magazine to report, "if the measures proposed [by Payne] be adopted by the General Conference, discord and dissolution will necessarily take place between the ignorant and intelligent portions of

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[81] Payne, History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church 156; Payne, The Semi-Centenary 48.

[82] Payne, History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church 156.

[83] Payne, The Semi-Centenary 51; Payne, Recollections of Seventy Years 220; Payne, History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church 141.

it."[84] Distressed that he had become the source of such contention, Payne threatened to quit the convention, but Bishop Brown ultimately prevailed upon him to remain as head of the education delegation.[85] When Payne finally introduced the resolution to implement a required course of studies for prospective AMEC clergy, "the effect was like unto that which follows when a fire-brand is cast into a magazine of powder. With the greatest apparent indignation the resolution was voted down by a large and overwhelming majority, and the house adjourned amid great excitement."[86] At this point, opponents of the proposal were told that if they continued to reject the resolution, those in favor would withdraw from the Conference and establish a separate ecclesiastical order.[87]

The next day, a highly respected, elderly minister gave an impassioned speech on the utility of clerical training, emphasizing the need for the AMEC to keep pace with other denominations. The audience was so impressed by his presentation that when he called for a reconsideration of the previous day's resolution, it carried by a near unanimous vote.[88] A committee of seven (including Payne) was then appointed to draft a set of required courses for prospective preachers and exhorters.[89]

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[84] Payne, History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church 396.

[85] Ibid.

[86] Payne, History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church 168; Payne, The Semi-Centenary 60.

[87] Payne, History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church 169.

[88] Payne, The Semi-Centenary 60-61; Payne, History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church 168-69.

[89] Payne, History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church 169; Payne, The Semi-Centenary 61.

The same year, Bishop Brown urged the AMEC "to establish a college for the education of our children and young men, as one of the most powerful and successful means for attaining the rights and dignity of American citizens."[90] However, most free blacks had to earn a living and could not afford to leave their families to pursue theological training. As a partial remedy, the AMEC established "education societies" to provide funding for prospective seminarians, but only three such agencies existed by 1846.[91] The denomination also founded a manual labor school near Columbus, Ohio called "The Union Seminary of the African Methodist Episcopal Church" (although it was administered exclusively by the Ohio Annual Conference).[92] This school opened sometime around December 1, 1847 and operated for about three years in the basement of a church, offering courses in agriculture, English, Latin, Greek and music. By the time the school moved to a farm (where it remained until the purchase of Wilberforce University in 1863), it had 100 students.[93] Its stated purpose was "the education of those young men who propose entering the ministry, and the improvement of our youth generally, both male and female, by instructing them in literature, science, agriculture and the mechanic arts." According to Payne, the school failed to flourish because it was located too far in the country for students to secure employment.[94]

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[90] Payne, The Semi-Centenary 64.

[91] Ibid. 74; Payne, History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church 207.

[92] Payne, The Semi-Centenary 70-71; Daniel 23.

[93] Payne, The Semi-Centenary 70-71; Payne, History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church 185.

[94] Payne, The Semi-Centenary 71; Payne, History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church 216.

The Union Seminary was sold in 1863, after the establishment of Wilberforce University (named after the eighteenth century English statesman and abolitionist William Wilberforce). Located midway between Columbus and Cincinnati, Ohio, the AMEC purchased the University from the broader Methodist Episcopal Church for $10,000.[95] Although the parent body had offered to help establish a black institution for higher learning in 1856, the AMEC had rejected the proposal on the grounds that "the Methodist Episcopal Church was proslavery and colonizationist...that the Anglo-Saxon was treacherous, and given to breaking compromises; that he was historically known to be the oppressor of the weak, the despair of the poor and the ignorant, especially of the black man..."[96] Nonetheless, Payne and others eventually chose to cooperate with the parent organization to secure Wilberforce University, the first black-controlled college in the country, with Payne serving as its president from 1863 to 1876.[97]

Payne's drive for an educated ministry was fueled by his desire to curb the "heathen" practices associated with Methodism. He strongly disapproved of loud exhorting, preachers pounding their fists against the pulpit, and other outbursts of emotion, like clapping, jumping, shouting, moaning, crying out in chorus, and falling

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[95] Payne, The Semi-Centenary 71; Payne, History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church 399; Woodson, Negro Orators and Their Orations 272; Daniel 23.

[96] Payne, History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church 193-94, 357.

[97] Swift, Black Prophets of Justice 5; Simmons 1084.

into swoons and convulsions.[98] Richard Allen, co-founder of the AMEC, expressed these same concerns as early as 1800 in a religious chant entitled "Spiritual Song", which was printed and sold as a broadside in Philadelphia.[99] Portions of it read:

> ...Such groaning and shouting, it sets me to doubting, I fear such religion is only a dream; The preachers were stamping the people were jumping, And screaming so loud that I neither could hear, Either praying or preaching, such horrible screeching, 'Twas truly offensive to all that were there?...The preachers and people they are but a rabble, And this is no place for reflection and pray'rs.
>
> No place for reflection, I'm fill'd with distraction, I wonder that people could bear to stay. The men they were bawling, the women were squaling, I know not for my part how any could pray; Such horrid confusion, if this be religion, Sure 'tis something new that never was seen, For the sacred pages that speak of all ages, Does no where declare that such ever has been...
>
> The scripture is wrested, for Paul hath protested, That order Should be kept in the houses of God, Amdist such a clatter who knows what they're after, Or who can attend to what is declared; To see them behaving like drunkards a-raving, And lying and rolling prostrate on the ground, I really felt awful and sometimes was fearful, That I'd be the next that would come tumbling down...[100]

Similar contemporary accounts of disorder and confusion were written about Methodist and Baptist camp meetings; yet, many blacks found the interactive, participatory style of these religious gatherings appealing.[101] The use of short stanzas

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[98] Payne, History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church 269.

[99] Dorothy B. Porter, Early Negro Writing, 1760-1837 (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971) 521; Payne, History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church 393.

[100] Porter, ed., Early Negro Writing 559-60.

[101] Payne, Recollections of Seventy Years 253-56; Caswell 316-17; Fearon 162-67; Dena Epstein, Sinful Tune & Spirituals: Black Folk Music to the Civil War (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977) 199, 218.

and call-and-response techniques, improvisation, and bodily movement initially were acceptable evangelical forms of religious expression characteristic of West African traditions.[102] However, white Methodists and Baptists associated secular music, dancing and other "extravagances" with idleness and sin, and church leaders increasingly objected to the demonstrative style of religious worship as practiced by their parishioners.[103]

To discourage spontaneity and emotionalism, Payne tried to replace the congregation's singing of fugue tunes (or "corn-field" ditties) with choirs and musical instruments. It should be noted that, by 1820, music had become an integral part of religious worship in most denominations; and, for the first time, it was considered a "science" to be taught in schools, like reading, writing or arithmetic.[104] The problem was that many Americans still associated choirs and organs with theatrical performances or cotillions that functioned to provide listeners with entertainment, not religious worship.[105] The issue of religious music was even more complicated for African Americans. Because their sacred songs grew out of a tradition of slavery and

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[102] Epstein 206.

[103] Ibid. 211; Woodson, The History of the Negro Church 127.

[104] "Strictures on the State of Sacred Music in the United States of America," Sunday School Magazine, August 1826, 231-36, microfilm, University of Massachusetts Amherst; "Thoughts on Singing," Methodist Magazine, April 1820, 145-48, microfilm, University of Massachusetts Amherst; The Christian Recorder, 2 February 1861, 31 January 31; Epstein 206-07; Edward James Kilsdonk, "Scientific Church Music and the Making of the Middle Class," eds., Bledstein and Johnston, The Middling Sorts (Routledge: New York, 2001) 128-35.

[105] "Strictures on the State of Sacred Music in the United States of America," Sunday School Magazine, August 1826, 233, 235.

oppression, they regarded their fugue tunes as being the very "essence of religion", making the matter of sacred music in black churches extremely contentious.[106]

Apparently, a choir was instituted uncontested as early as 1830 in an AME church in New York City, but the plan met with considerable resistance in most other congregations.[107] For instance, at the Bethel Church* in Philadelphia, opposition to choral singing forced Payne to preach a special sermon on its merits.[108] Later, in 1841, at the dedication of the Church's new building, the "old people" refused to follow their hymnals and join with the choir in "singing by note."[109] The following year, when the church sponsored a "vocal soiree" (sacred concert) as a fund raising event, many elderly members (especially some "aged sisters") became so incensed that they broke with the church. Indeed, concern over this incident "was so deep and wide-spread" that Payne again preached a sermon in the choir's defense.[110] Similarly, in 1857, in Chicago, church officials impeached Reverend Elisha Weaver for using a choir and instrumental music during services; and when this issue was raised at the Annual Conference, a

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[106] Payne, Recollections of Seventy Years 254.

[107] Payne, History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church 458; Payne, Recollections of Seventy Years 234.

* Philadelphia's Bethel Church, or Mother Bethel, was the largest black denomination in the city founded by Richard Allen in 1794.

[108] Payne, Recollections of Seventy Years 233-35.

[109] Ibid. 452.

[110] Ibid.

resolution was proposed "declaring instrumental music detrimental" to the Church's spiritual interests.[111]

The conflict over religious music was not unique to the AMEC. In 1859, a letter written by the Singing School Association attached to the First Presbyterian Church (a black congregation) in Philadelphia complained that it had been subjected to ridicule by some older church members for its new singing methods. The association essentially told the church that, in order to continue its work, it needed "protection" from those who used their age as "an invulnerable shield behind which they place themselves with the most perfect security and heap upon us scumillity [sic], abuse and insult with the utmost impunity."[112] Opposition to choirs often came from older church members who wanted to sing and compose their own melodies and lyrics, and it is instructive that they were not totally denied that privilege. As late as 1878, the church Discipline stated:

> The preacher shall not encourage the singing of fugue tunes in our public congregation. We do not think that fugue tunes are sinful or improper to be used in private companies; but we do not approve of their being used in public congregations, because public singing is a part of Divine worship, in which all the congregation ought to join.[113]

Perhaps, church officials sought to placate older members of the congregation by allowing them to sing fugue tunes in "private company". Indeed, they had no control over this practice, anyway. But maybe their tolerance held a deeper meaning.

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[111] Payne, Recollections of Seventy Years 234-35.

[112] The Singing School Association, The American Negro Historical Society, Gardiner Collection, reel #7, 1859, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

[113] The Doctrines and Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (Philadelphia, 1878) n.p.

Possibly, it signaled the Church's recognition that these songs were a crucial part of a painful legacy worth preserving.

Postscript

Strong opposition developed in many churches when vocalists were first set apart as singers. However, according to Payne, virtually all AME congregations accepted the idea of choirs by about 1860.[114] What brought about this change in attitude over such a short period?

Methodists prescribed to a strict code of discipline, exerting more control over the moral standards of their church members than any other denomination.[115] Pastors and church courts operating in many AME parishes were authorized to purge individuals from congregations for refusing to submit to church teachings or practices.[116] Furthermore, since Methodists were bound by the rules and regulations adopted by their conferences, local churches often were forced to comply with unpopular policies.[117] Yet, while the laity had limited say in the leadership's decision-making process, they were not without influence. As previously mentioned, members of the Ebenezer Church in Baltimore formally rejected Payne as their minister, despite the fact that all AMEC appointments were made by ecclesiastical order and congregants

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[114] Payne, History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church 458; Payne, Recollections of Seventy Years 235.

[115] Nash, Forging Freedom 192.

[116] Reed 34-36; Donald Yacovone, "The Transformation of the Black Temperance Movement, 1827-1854," Journal of the Early Republic 8 (Fall 1988): 295.

[117] Woodson, The History of the Negro Church 94.

generally had no say in the choice of their preacher. And although Payne opted to vacate his post voluntarily, his parishioners' wishes obviously affected his thinking.

Moreover, Payne's contention that all AME churches consented to using choirs and organs by 1860 simply was wishful thinking. According to the AMEC's traveling literary agent*, many parishioners continued to "make fugue tunes for themselves" because so few congregants could read their hymnals.[118] Payne himself admitted that the singing of fugue tunes was characteristic of many AME churches (even those "in the more enlightened regions") as late as 1878.[119] Indeed, although fugue tunes and slave spirituals gradually were replaced by more traditional hymns, the "shout", moaning, clapping, and other bodily movements persist in AMEC services even today.

The church's efforts to educate black ministers also met with limited success. According to a study of the 52 black schools that offered theological courses in the United States from 1923-1924, only one required a candidate to have a college education; seven more mandated a high school diploma; and 35 accepted applicants in the fourth through seventh grades.[120] Most of these schools failed to properly examine credentials for admission because administrators felt that the need for black preachers

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* The traveling agent, Reverend George Hogarth, sold subscriptions to the AMEC's monthly organ, The Christian Herald, the first paper published by the denomination beginning in 1848.

[118] Payne, History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church 194.

[119] Ibid. 193.

[120] Daniel 49-50.

was so great that a person's willingness to serve was more important than his years of schooling.[121]

A study conducted in 1926 also evaluated the education of white ministers in 17 of the largest denominations. It too found that only one-third of white clergy had attended both a college and a seminary; and that two-fifths had neither college nor seminary training.[122] If formal theological training was not even the norm for white ministers by 1920, it is likely that most AMEC ministers of the period also lacked seminary training.

Conclusion

Carter G. Woodson has written that the major impetus behind black clerical education was the need to advance "the work of the Church."[123] Payne made a similar point when he stated that without adequate ministerial training "our excellent discipline cannot be fully executed..."[124] Both men seemed to agree that theological education would help ministers spread the word of God and facilitate conversions. At the same time, it rendered black ministers better equipped to act as community leaders, enabling them to enlighten the people, both spiritually and politically. In addition, church reformers maintained that educated clergy guided all great societies and would bring

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[121] Daniel 49.

[122] Brown 65.

[123] Woodson, The History of the Negro Church 147.

[124] Payne, History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church 141.

blacks wealth, power and respectability.[125] Formal schooling was the key. Accordingly, an AME minister told his audience at an Ohio Annual Conference:

> A correct education lies as the foundation of the elevation of our people, and is the principle lever in the divine arrangement to raise us, as a people, out of the vortex of oppression and degradation into which our enemies have placed [us], and our ignorance retains us. We would observe, that just in proportion to an individual's intelligence, is he prepared to resist or calmly submit to the encroachments on his liberty...[126]

For the AMEC, the issue of an educated ministry assumed added significance because the denomination had been widely identified with emotionalism and ignorance. Furthermore, many AMEC congregants fiercely resisted attempts to modify their zealous style of religious worship, continuing to perform traditional practices, despite the Church's repeated admonitions. Nonetheless, clerical reformers managed to implement some educational measures without causing a lasting fissure in the church and without losing a significant number of disgruntled church members. In several instances, they were able to sway the majority to their reform way of thinking. It seems that many congregants also recognized the value of education and its potential to transform race relations.

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[125] Payne, Recollections of Seventy Years 253; The Colored American, 27 January 1838.

[126] Payne, The Semi-Centenary 107.

CHAPTER 4

"LITERACY OR CONVERSION?": FREE BLACK INVOLVEMENT IN THE SUNDAY SCHOOL MOVEMENT

America's cultural emphasis on moral improvement was reflected in the phenomenal rise of the Sunday school movement. Enjoying remarkable growth, especially in northern cities, the popularity of Sunday schools is demonstrated by these figures: about one-third of Philadelphia's youth between the ages of six and fifteen were Sabbath school members by the 1820s, while approximately 41% of all children aged four to fifteen received religious instruction in New York City.[1] By 1826, the American Sunday School Union* (the country's largest interdenominational Sabbath school association) claimed over 48,500 pupils, with as many as 377 subsidiary societies located in 22 out of the 24 states in the nation.[2]

Many Americans, especially the poor, willingly embraced Sunday schools during the antebellum period, although reformers openly admitted that the movement was designed to influence lower-class behavior. They feared that the popular will, if left unchecked, would give way to crime, disorder and fanaticism.[3] Emerging

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[1] Paul Boyer, Urban Masses & Moral Order in America, 1820-1920 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978) 41.

* The American Sunday School Union originated as the First-Day Society founded in 1791. The First-Day Society led to the organization of the Philadelphia Sunday and Adult School Union in 1817. This organization then joined with other similar societies to become the American Sunday School Union in 1824.

[2] The American Sunday School Union Papers, Annual Report, 1824, Part A, 72 and Annual Report, 1826, Part C, 1, microfilm, Union Theological Seminary, Richmond, VA.

[3] Carroll Smith Rosenberg, Religion & the Rise of the American City, The NYC Mission Movement, 1812-1870 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1971) 48; Edwin W. Rice, The Sunday School (cont.)

manufacturing and mercantile interests also sought to inculcate values among the masses that would foster orderly work habits.[4] At the same time, others genuinely wished to provide poor children with an elementary education, even if the movement's overall aim was to produce productive and virtuous citizens.

Notable philanthropists of different denominations (including Benjamin Rush and Matthew Carey) organized The First Day or Sunday-School Society of Philadelphia on December 26, 1790.[5] Shortly after its formation, members petitioned the legislature to establish tax-supported schools throughout the state.[6] Failing in this effort, the Society continued to provide for the educational needs of economically disadvantaged youth, while at the same time keeping them constructively occupied on the Sabbath.[7]

Movement, 1780-1917, and the American Sunday School Union, 1817-1917 (Philadelphia: publisher, American Sunday School Union, 1917) 50; Raymond Mohl, Poverty in New York, 1783-1825 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971) 185.

[4] Mohl 187; Boyer 34-37, 43, 47, 49; Anne M. Boylan, Sunday School: The Formation of an American Institution, 1790-1860 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988)) 3. Also see E. P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class. Thompson targets Methodist Sunday schools in England as agents of British industrialists. Thomas Walter Laquer, Religion and Respectability: Sunday Schools and Working Class Culture, 1780-1850, challenges Thompson's argument by identifying English Sunday schools as working class institutions.

[5] First Day or Sunday-School Society in Philadelphia, Pa., Minutes, 1790-1858, vol. 1, n. pag., Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia; Rice 46; Clifford S. Griffin, Their Brothers' Keepers: Moral Stewardship in the US, 1800-1865 (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1960) 29.

[6] First Day or Sunday-School Society, Minutes, 1790-1858, vol. 1, n. p.; The American Sunday School Union Papers, Board of Managers Minutes, 1824-1912, Part D, reel #212 (taken from the ASSU, Its Origin, Its Object, Its Work).

[7] Rice 45, 48.

Black Participation in the Sunday School Movement

Northern blacks were perceived to be in a very "low state" of moral development and especially in need of Sunday school training. Slaves, however, posed the greatest threat to society's moral fabric, and northern whites believed their emancipation was imminent. In alarmist tones, one source predicted that freed bondsmen would have a corrupting influence, spreading a "mass of moral pollution" among the white population, which was their punishment for the national sin of slavery.[8] White reformers in Troy, New York also blamed slavery for their black community's "state of heathenism", while at the same time claiming responsibility for their degraded condition. Again, alluding to the collective sin of enslavement, these reformers sought to atone for their complicity in the system by establishing black Sunday schools under white management.[9]

In Philadelphia, Sunday schools specifically for black people were founded not long after the First Day Society was started. One such school, run by Quakers, taught black men reading and writing during the summer.[10] The Society of Friends organized another Sunday school in the early nineteenth century primarily joined by black adults of both sexes. The school averaged about 200 students, and instruction was scheduled

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[8] The Sunday School Repository, Report of the Albany Sunday School Society, August 1818, 95, microfilm, University of Massachusetts Amherst.

[9] Ibid., September 1817, 181-82.

[10] American Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, Minutes, 1797, 33, Schomburg Center for Research and Culture, New York City.

"so as not to interfere with their usual hours of attending their places of worship".[11] A black Sabbath school also opened in the winter of 1796 at the Methodist meeting house on Sixth Street. Its teachers were mainly white abolitionists, and between 50 to 90 black people, again mostly adults, attended.[12] The first Sunday school that opened in New York City (in April 1811) was established solely for the benefit of black women. Also administered by Quakers, it numbered approximately 55 students and remained opened for at least ten years.[13]

By 1820, the London Sunday School Union noted that popular interest in religious instruction had spread especially among African Americans.[14] Historian Carleton Mabee has supported their assertion, finding that attendance of free blacks in New York City Sunday schools far outstripped their percentage of the city's population. According to records of the New York Sunday School Union, in 1821, 26% of its students were black pupils, whereas only 9% of the community was African American.[15] Likewise, historian Anne Boylan, in her comprehensive study of the American Sunday school movement, found that in 1819 grown blacks comprised about

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[11] Benjamin Johnson, letter to Stephen Grellet, 25 May 1816, A.L.S., Grellet Mss., vol. 1, 1701-1818, p. 217, A1.4, Sh. 30, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

[12] American Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, Minutes, 1797, 34.

[13] Society for the Prevention of Pauperism in the City of New York, Annual Reports of the Managers, 1821, 14, New York Historical Society, New York City; Narratives of Colored Americans (New York, 1882) 242.

[14] The Sunday School Repository, Report London Sunday School Union, 1820, vol. 4, p. 435. (Taken from Rice, The Sunday-School Movement, 1780-1917 and the American Sunday-School Union, 1817-1917, 65.)

[15] Mabee, Black Education in New York State 46.

two-thirds of the students enrolled in schools administered by the Philadelphia Sunday and Adult School Union.[16]

Sunday school records clearly indicate that many free blacks availed themselves of these organizations. For instance, after administrators initially delayed establishing a Sunday school in Troy, New York to determine whether free blacks in fact wanted to be instructed, 90 people attended the school the first day that it opened. Total enrollment by 1817 was 160 students (of whom 105 were women), with students ranging between the ages of five and 60.[17] About 20 years later, when Reverend Daniel Payne opened another nondenominational Sunday school for blacks of all ages, it attracted up to one-third of the city's African Americans.[18] Free blacks also went to Sabbath schools in a number of areas in Pennsylvania, in addition to attending schools in Philadelphia and its suburbs.[19]

Numerous accounts say that they advanced rapidly in reading.[20] In 1816, the Sunday school attached to the Chatham Street Methodist Church in New York City

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[16] Boylan 23.

[17] The Sunday School Repository, September 1817, 185-86.

[18] Mabee, Black Education in New York State 41.

[19] The American Sunday School Union Papers, Annual Report, 1824, Part A, 30, 34, 35, 38; Annual Report, 1826, Part C, 50; The American Sunday School Magazine, microfilm, University of Massachusetts Amherst, February 1828, 60-61; July 1828, 210; October 1828, 306; July 1825, 218; Annual Report, 1826, Part C, 50.

[20] The American Sunday School Magazine, October 1828, 306, July 1828, 210; The American Sunday School Union Papers, Annual Report, 1825, Part C, 60; Annual Reports of the New York Female Union Society for the Promotion of Sabbath Schools, Annual Report, May 10, 1818, School #20 and #25, 15, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia; Benjamin Quarles, Black Abolitionists (New York; Oxford University Press, 1969) 49.

briefly suspended school exercises "to relate the astonishing progrefs [sic] in learning of two African adults, one of whom two weeks previous knew only the alphabet, and the other could spell but words of two letters, yet in consequence of persevering application were now enabled to read to satisfaction." Church records stated that black adults especially manifested "a disposition for receiving instruction".[21]

Not all free blacks, however, exhibited the same level of dedication. After students at the African Sunday school in Utica, New York refused to thank God "for the preservation of their existence", they reportedly ridiculed their teachers and treated them with "contempt".[22] Similar examples of such incorrigibility seldom appear in the record, yet free blacks were sometimes publicly reprimanded for their refractory conduct. At an anniversary address before the Lombard Street (Colored) Sabbath School associated with the Wesley Church in Philadelphia, the school's Superintendent scolded free blacks for their ungrateful behavior:

> Many of us come a long distance, and are compelled to make great sacrifices, and to endure great bodily exertion and fatigue. We come upon our own charges. We pay our own expenses. We pay for the use of this building. We find our own books. We supply your children with bibles and testaments and library books. In addition to coming here twice on the Sabbath, we meet together every Saturday evening, to consult over the interests of the school... There are some persons in the community...who entertain very erroneous views of the Sabbath school. They not only do not appreciate its importance, nor the obligations which they are under to the teachers for their self-denying labours [sic], but they seem to think that they are doing the school and the teachers a

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[21] Methodist Episcopal Church Records, Minutes of the Methodist Branch of the New York Sunday School Union Society at the New York Free School in Chatham Street, 14 April 1816, 6 May 1816, microfilm, New York Public Library, New York City.

[22] Annual Reports of the New York Female Union Society, Annual Report, 10 May 1818, Appendix to Report #2, First Annual Report of the Utica African Sunday School, 30.

> favour [sic] in allowing their children to attend! How strange...yet it is no less strange than true, that there are many who seem thus to think. What! Doing the teachers a favour [sic] in sending your children to the Sabbath school![23]

Free blacks at several other schools also showed signs of indifference or ingratitude.[24] In one instance, it was even reported that a group opposed to Sunday schools used violence against school supporters.[25] Nonetheless, sources overwhelmingly indicate that many free blacks favored religious instruction.

Literacy Versus Conversion

The question is, were free blacks primarily concerned with literacy or salvation? The following excerpts and summaries are taken from reports of the New York Female Union Society regarding conversion rates in about one-third of its Sunday schools:

> - only a single black adult out of 40 publicly professed religion in a one-year period;
>
> - officials could not recount "any instance of saving conversion among the children" (although the "coloured [sic] adults, and some of the whites, often shed tears, and appear[ed] serious and thoughtful");
>
> - none of the children had been converted out of a combined total of at least 168 students;
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> - among 148 pupils, administrators hoped that one white girl and three black adults might be "brought to the gospel";
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> - five black adults had been saved, including a 70 year old female who had attended the school for three years;

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[23] The Pennsylvania Freeman, 4 March 1841.

[24] The American Sunday School Union Papers, Annual Report, 1825, Part C, 60 (Taken from Annual Report of Columbia and Green Counties, New York); The Sunday School Repository, June 1818, 71.

[25] The Sunday School Repository, Second Annual Report of the Board of Inspectors of the Troy Sunday School Association, August 1818, 84-85.

- advocates found "no evidence of any effectual work of grace upon [the] hearts" of students, and could "say nothing encouraging respecting the religious impressions of the scholars";

- out of 201 students, officials admitted, "we find our scholars attentive and inquiring when they are addressed from the sacred truths, and sometimes they appear much solemnly affected, yet we cannot perceive any lasting and pious impression on their minds";

- only eight out of 36 students made a public declaration of faith that year;

- administrators reported, "two colored women are professors of religion; one other has proposed herself as a member of our church; three appear to be near the kingdom, and several others seriously exercised";

- and authorities noted, "we do not know that the children under our care have received any religious impressions, yet they have made considerable progress in their lessons".[26]

While many Sunday school pupils made significant gains in education, they seemed relatively unconcerned with conversion or that "one needful thing".[27]

Sabbath schools in Philadelphia followed a similar pattern, causing organizers to regret that so few students had become practicing Christians.[28] One Philadelphia Sunday school union that administered to five schools with 39 teachers and 500 students indicated that only a single assistant teacher and one pupil had joined the church.[29] Likewise, in Boston, at the African Methodist Sunday school run by Reverend Samuel Snowden, merely one teacher and six scholars had made a public

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[26] Annual Reports of the New York Female Union Society, First Annual Report, 9 April 1817, 5, 6, 10, 15; Seventh Annual Report, April 1823, 8, 23; Eighth Annual Report, April 1824, 6; Ninth Annual Report, April 1825, 6, 15, Eleventh Annual Report, 14.

[27] Ibid. Seventh Annual Report, April 1823, 18, 23; Ninth Annual Report, April 1825, 4.

[28] The American Sunday School Union Papers, Annual Report, 1826, Part C, 83.

[29] Ibid., Annual Report, 1824, 21.

profession of religion since the school had opened (in 1823), although 122 students (77 children and 45 adults) had passed through its doors.[30]

It is not surprising that many teachers remained unconverted since they often themselves were former Sunday school students.[31] Furthermore, because administrators relied on a voluntary system to secure and retain instructors, their exact qualifications remained uncertain, although, at a minimum, they were expected to have knowledge of the bible and possess religious character.[32] Still, this was an ideal standard. In 1838, The Colored American reported, "we are aware that a large number of teachers are young, amiable, and well-disposed persons, but who, nevertheless, make no pretensions to experimental religion..."[33] In another article captioned Unfaithfulness of Teachers, the author contended that many Sunday school teachers refused to pray with students or "instruct them in the principles of religion."[34] According to statistics published by the New York Sunday School Union in 1826, out of its 774 teachers, only 417 were avowed converts.[35] These circumstances struck one Episcopalian minister as being ridiculous. The very nature of the service demanded that Sunday school teachers at

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[30] The American Sunday School Union Papers, Annual Report, 1826, Part C, 18.

[31] Boylan 109, 112.

[32] Ibid. 128-29, 131; Stephen H. Tyng, Forty Years' Experience in Sunday-Schools (New York, 1860) 82, 177; Annual Reports of the New York Female Union Society, Annual Report, 10 May 1818.

[33] The Colored American, 18 August 1838.

[34] The American Sunday School Magazine, October 1828, 306.

[35] The American Sunday School Union Papers, Annual Report, 1826, Part C, 25; The American Sunday School Magazine, June 1827, 163.

least be professed Christians.[36] Nonetheless, School No. 43 of the New York Female Union Society reported, "not one of our teachers is pious".[37] It appears that, in the absence of recreational activities and other emotional outlets for youth, many of them became Sunday School instructors primarily for comradeship.[38]

A related but more pressing concern was how to strike a balance between secular and religious education. Although Sunday schools were originally founded to teach poor children to read, only a portion of the time was supposed to be devoted exclusively to literacy.[39] In 1792, the First Day Society stipulated that instruction in its schools be confined to reading and writing from the Bible, except in cases where individuals were not literate. Only then the use of spelling books and primers was considered appropriate.[40]

The Methodist Sunday School Union, formed in 1827, was especially adamant on this point, maintaining "the Sunday School is under no obligation to furnish miscellaneous and secular reading to a community." They believed that "Sunday schools should be strictly and entirely religious institutions"; that "neither the Art of Writing, nor any other merely secular branch of knowledge, shall be taught on the

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[36] Tyng 83-84, 86.

[37] Annual Reports of the New York Female Union Society, Seventh Annual Report, April 1823, 25.

[38] Boyer 63-64.

[39] The American Sunday School Union Papers, Annual Report, Part C, 85; Rice 74.

[40] First Day or Sunday-School Society, Minutes, 1790-1858, vol. 1, n. pag.; Board of Visitors Minutes, 1791-1835, vol. 1, constitution, 42.

Lord's Day".[41] But the American Sunday School Union (ASSU) took a more moderate position, making its material as "attractive and intelligible" as possible. Because learners simply were not interested in reading literature of a solely religious nature, the agency broadened its subject matter to include history, biographies, travel, narratives, and science.[42] The material, written "in strict accordance with truth and nature", generally conveyed a moral message and a spirit of reverence, as well as furnishing entertainment.[43] Supposedly, this secular literature would be used as a medium to stimulate the intellect, preparing individuals to receive religious knowledge later.[44] The ASSU actually had no alternative but to expand its material, if it wished to promote Sabbath schools. As a librarian at the Seventh Presbyterian Church noted, books "of a solid religious character are almost wholly unasked for", and officials of a Sabbath school in Providence, Rhode Island suspected that recently enrolled students had joined "for the sake of the books rather than the lessons."[45]

Racism and White Sunday School Unions

Yet, combining secular education with religious instruction undermined the notion that literacy was not an end in itself, but a means to salvation. Indeed, the

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[41] Addie Grace Wardle, " History of the Sunday School Movement in the Methodist Episcopal Church, diss., U of Chicago, 1918, 29, 61, 156.

[42] Rice 145; The American Sunday School Union Papers, Annual Report, Annual Meeting, 1837, Part C, 7, Annual Report, 1838, Part C, 23, 65.

[43] Rice 144-46; The American Sunday School Union Papers, Annual Meeting, 1837, Part C, 7.

[44] The American Sunday School Union Papers, Annual Report, 1830, Part C, 16-17.

[45] Boylan 50; The American Sunday School Union Papers, Annual Report, 1837, Part C, 86.

purpose of learning to read was to gain knowledge of the bible. Moreover, since secular studies not grounded in religion were deemed dangerous, even immoral, in a democracy, Sunday school teachers were directed to instruct black youth in both their duty to God and the laws of society. Hence, in an 1838 address honoring the abolition of slavery in the British West Indies, a reverend told his audience that moral and religious instruction should take precedence over academic progress. He admonished Sunday school teachers for spending too much time teaching reading and writing without adequately discussing the "safeguards to liberty".[46] Free blacks specifically were warned, "their religious and moral education should keep pace with their knowledge of letters".[47]

Southern planters, in particular, viewed black Sunday schools as a threat to class relations. They feared that bible studies would only heighten slaves' awareness of their subordinate status, ultimately proving "dangerous to their masters safety". Others maintained that bible studies actually made slaves "better servants".[48] Consequently, after initial opposition, many blacks did receive religious instruction in southern jurisdictions, yet this pattern remained inconsistent.[49] In 1853, the same year that a black Sabbath school in Washington, D. C. registered 600 students, a white woman in

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[46] The Colored American, 18 August 1838.

[47] American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, Minutes, 1804, 36.

[48] Reverend Breckenridge's Address, The American Sunday School Magazine, July 1825, 196-97.

[49] Wm. Slocomb, Preceptor of an Academy at Marietta, Ohio, to his friend in Boston, The Sunday School Repository, 13 August 1818, 110; The American Sunday School Union Papers, Annual Report, 1824, Part A, 50-51; Annual Report, 1826, Part C, 87-88; Annual Report, 1827, Part C, 101; The American Sunday School Magazine, February 1827, 47.

Norfolk was charged with violating the laws of Virginia that forbade instructing black children. Acting in her own defense, Margaret Douglas argued that, despite the law, the practice of teaching blacks already was sanctioned by custom in many of the city's churches that operated Sunday schools specifically for that purpose. While none of her witnesses openly admitted having "actually seen Negroes taught from books in any of the Sunday schools" the fact that nearly all of them could read indicated that teachers had disregarded the statute. In terms of her own culpability, Douglas pled ignorance, claiming that she was unaware of the city ordinance. Nonetheless, she was fined one dollar and sentenced to a minimum of six months imprisonment.[50]

Earlier, in 1825, southern resistance to black Sunday schools surfaced in Nashville, Tennessee where slaveholders feared that literate slaves would "attempt to wrest the power from the hands of their masters; or thereby be better able to devise means of escape."[51] Yet, in spite of their concerns, a black school for adults was started by a bible society in nearby Columbia.[52] Likewise, about 60 students (many of them slaves) enrolled in a Sunday school run by a black Baptist preacher in St. Louis. Blacks also attended a Sabbath school in Mobile, Alabama, but they could not be taught in neighboring Natchez.[53] Southern opposition to black bible schools thus ran unevenly, at least until 1834 when most southern states restricted black religious studies to oral

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[50] The National Era, 2 June 1853, 15 December 1853; Frederick Douglass Paper, 23 December 1853.

[51] The American Sunday School Union Papers, Annual Report, 1825, Part C, 87.

[52] The American Sunday School Magazine, January 1828.

[53] Ibid., April 1825, September 1825; The American Sunday School Union Papers, Annual Report, 1825, Part C, 88; Annual Report, 1826, Part C, 62; Annual Report, 1824, Part A, n. pag.

instruction, primarily due to Nat Turner's insurrection. Historian Carter G. Woodson has estimated that, by 1840, only about 15 black Sunday schools remained in the south attended by approximately 1,459 students.[54]

Black Sabbath schools in the north also encountered racism as evidenced by their inability to secure financial support and adequate facilities.* For example, many black female students failed to attend St. Paul's Sunday school in Philadelphia because the classroom was too small to accommodate them.[55] Likewise, a teacher in Albany, New York blamed her difficulty in finding a meeting place for her students on white resistance to teaching Negroes.[56] And, by the 1860s, black Sunday school students in New York City were bombarded with stones.[57]

Sabbath schools frequently held public anniversary celebrations where students received books or some other reward in recognition of their accomplishments. While as many as 15,000 to 20,000 people might be present, black students sometimes were omitted.[58] In 1841, at the anniversary celebration of the Philadelphia Sunday School Union, black schools belonging to the association were refused admittance, whereas

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[54] Carter G. Woodson, The Education of the Negro Prior to 1861 (New York: Arno Press, 1968) 184-85.

* Many churches initially did not allow Sunday schools to be housed in their buildings.

[55] The American Sunday School Union Papers, Annual Report, 1824, Part A, 24.

[56] Report of the Board of the Albany Sunday School Society, The Sunday School Repository, August 1818, 89-91.

[57] Mabee, Black Education in New York State 42.

[58] The American Sunday School Magazine, June 1825, 185; Boyer 41.

1,800 white students and teachers attended.[59] Black students, however, were not always excluded. In 1826, at the Essex County Sabbath School Union's festivities in New Jersey, the gathering included "a respectable number of coloured [sic] people" from the African Church's Sunday school. At least 480 African Americans were members of the Essex County union.[60] Likewise, joined by about 5000 other students from New York City, the African Sunday School marched down Broadway, their banner reading "The Truth Shall Make You Free".[61] Black adults also sung a hymn at the anniversary of the New York Female Union Society.[62]

But, again, black participation did not always meet with white approval. In 1866, at a Sunday school parade in Williamsburg, Long Island, white scholars withdrew from the procession altogether because they were placed behind a black Sunday school in marching order.[63] Much earlier, black public school students were denied the privilege of participating in a children's procession honoring the United States president then on tour in Boston because "it would be offensive to a southerner if the colored children should turn out to receive him."[64]

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[59] The Pennsylvania Freeman, 4 June 1841, 10 November 1841.

[60] The American Sunday School Magazine, May 1826, 158; The American Sunday School Union Papers, Annual Report, Part C, 42.

[61] Mabee, Black Education in New York State 40.

[62] The Sunday School Repository, September 1817, 30.

[63] Mabee, Black Education in New York State 42.

[64] Edward S. Abdy, Journal of a Residence and Tour in the United States of North America, 3 vols. (London, 1835), vol. 3, 251-52.

Indeed, abolitionists maintained that northern Sunday school unions sought to appease slaveholders. For the most part, they did not teach that slavery was a sin and several union organizers either had close business ties to southerners or exhibited pro-slavery leanings.[65] For example, in 1834, Joseph H. Dulles inherited a South Carolina plantation from his aunt while manager of the ASSU, and Reverend James Milnor, an Episcopalian, served at separate times as both president of the New York City Colonization Society and the New York Sunday School Union.[66] Reportedly, the superintendent of a Sunday school attached to the Unitarian church in Troy, New York even defended slavery as a "God ordained institution", stating "if Christ were now on earth and a resident at the South, he would undoubtedly be a slaveholder."[67] While it was unusual for northern Sunday school leaders to brazenly support slavery in this fashion, the fact remains that no prominent union figure was an abolitionist.[68]

Initially, the ASSU supported black Sunday schools and even kept statistics of the students' progress, asking its auxiliaries to report on the number of both black and white learners, at least until the late 1820s.[69] Meanwhile, in keeping with its Constitution "to plant a Sunday school wherever there is a population", the union

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[65] The North Star, 11 February 1848.

[66] Boylan 64; Mabee, Black Education in New York State 43; Griffin 191.

[67] The North Star, 11 February 1848.

[68] Boylan 64.

[69] The American Sunday School Union Papers, Annual Report, 1824, Part A, n. p.

started to expand into slaveholding regions.[70] Furthermore, as early 1826, just two years after the ASSU was formally organized, nine of its 25 vice presidents were southerners.[71] Consequently, it shortly became the agency's official policy to remain neutral on the issue of slavery, refraining from forming black Sunday schools in southern jurisdictions where local populations protested. At the same time, it decided to expunge all references to slavery from its literature.[72] This policy drew sharp criticism from abolitionists, especially by the late 1840s, when the ASSU withdrew from its book collection a publication written for children entitled "Jacob and his Sons" (or the Second Part of a Conversation between Mary and her Mother). Allegedly, the book contained anti-slavery passages.

The offending material concerned an Old Testament account of Joseph's sale into bondage, wherein a mother describes to her daughter the injustice of his condition:

> Mary: What is a slave, Mother? Is it a servant?
> Mother: Yes, slaves are servants, for they work for their masters and wait on them; but they are not hired servants, but are bought and sold like beasts, and have nothing but what their masters choose to give them. They are obliged to work very hard, and sometimes their masters use them cruelly, beat them, and starve them, and kill them – for they have nobody to help them. Sometimes they are chained together and driven about like beasts.[73]

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[70] The American Sunday School Union Papers, reel #212, Board of Managers Minutes, 1824-1912, Part D, n. pag.; Annual Meeting, May 21, 1833, Part C, n. p.; Constitution, Annual Report, 1825, Part C, 106.

[71] Ibid., Part B, 14.

[72] Boylan 82, 84; "Letters Respecting a Book 'Dropped from the Catalogue' of the American Sunday-School Union in Compliance with the Dictation of a Slave Power" 1848. In The Influence of the Slave Power; With Other Anti-Slavery Pamphlets 1836-1848. (Westport, CT: Negro University Press, 1970) 23, 25.

[73] "Letters Respecting a Book 'Dropped from the Catalogue'", 14.

The book, a reprint from an English edition published in 1832, had been in circulation some 15 years before catching the eye of a South Carolinian ASSU vice president. Worried that the passage might "make a wrong impression on the mind of the reader", he conveyed his concerns to the organization's Committee of Publication, a group of eight men from different denominations responsible for providing the union's Sunday schools with suitable reading material.[74] They also had authority to alter or expunge any literature that might cause the public "offence or misapprehension".[75] In addition, once officials of the South Carolina Sunday School Union became aware of "Jacob and his Sons", the news spread to southern presses and regional leaders. They all joined in calling for the book's immediate suppression and advised southerners to stop supporting the ASSU financially.[76]

The Committee of Publication responded by ordering the work discontinued, alleging it falsely inferred that masters could wantonly kill slaves with impunity.[77] To further justify its decision, the ASSU issued a circular maintaining that while the passage might accurately reflect slave conditions in other geographic areas, the depiction was not applicable to bondage in America.[78] Abolitionists, in turn, hotly

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[74] "Letters Respecting a Book 'Dropped from the Catalogue'" 3, 4-5, 12; The American Sunday School Union Papers, Annual Report, 1831, Part C, 14.

[75] The American Sunday School Union Papers, Annual Report, 1830, Part C, 16.

[76] "Letters Respecting a Book 'Dropped from the Catalogue'" 4, 9, 34; The National Era, 21 October 1847, vol. 1, no. 42, 2.

[77] "Letters Respecting a Book 'Dropped from the Catalogue'" 4, 23-24.

[78] Ibid., 5, 14.

accused the ASSU of being in league with "the cotton interest".[79] They pointed out, "the life of the slave is placed, by law, at the will of the master", and demanded to know, "where in the name of all that is true, will such a description apply, if it will not here?"[80]

However, by the time this controversy erupted in 1848, free blacks already had withdrawn from white Sunday school unions in large numbers.[81] As early as 1824, the New York Female Union Society reported that many blacks previously enrolled in its School No. 9 now attended "schools instituted for them exclusively, and to Sabbath evening schools".[82] The following year, regarding this same institution, officials again noted, "a large proportion of our school are coloured [sic] adults who now find it more pleasing to attend the schools lately opened expressly for themselves."[83]

It is not clear whether African or Anglo Americans established these initial institutions, especially during the early antebellum period when few black Sunday schools were connected to black churches. Prior to the 1830s, most black students were taught in white Sunday schools, typically in racially segregated classrooms.[84] The records of white Sabbath school unions generally would not have reflected what

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[79] The National Era, 21 August 1851, vol. 5, no. 242, 133.

[80] "Letters Respecting a Book 'Dropped from the Catalogue'" 13, 29.

[81] Woodson, The Education of the Negro Prior to 1861 124.

[82] Annual Reports of the New York Female Union Society, April 1824, 7-8.

[83] Ibid., April 1825, 8.

[84] Mabee, Black Education in New York State 36, 47.

independent black Sunday schools existed. In 1824, the Sunday School Society of York County, Pennsylvania did attempt to ascertain the number of schools not under its jurisdiction. It reported, "there are three other Sunday schools in town...one in the African Church, number of scholars we have not yet heard."[85] Although the records of most early independent black Sunday schools are nonexistent, we can still piece together some information regarding their operations and general characteristics.

Black Sunday Schools

Historian Gary B. Nash has indicated that Richard Allen, founder of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (and himself a former Sunday school pupil of Anthony Benezet), established the first black Sunday school in the United States in 1795 at his church, Philadelphia's Mother Bethel.[86] It contained the largest black Sunday school in the city with 524 students, increasing to 650 pupils by 1856.[87] Still considered "the mammoth school in the city" as late as 1863, Mother Bethel was followed by Saint Thomas's Sunday school in terms of enrollment.[88]

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[85] The American Sunday School Union Papers, Annual Report, 1824, Part A, 30.

[86] Gary B. Nash, Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988) 204; Nancy Slocum Hornick, "Anthony Benezet and the Africans' School: Toward a Theory of Full Equality," Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography 99 (1975): 415.

[87] Carol V. R. George, "Widening the Circle: the Black Church and the Abolitionist Crusade, 1830-1860," eds. Lewis Perry and Michael Fellman, Antislavery Reconsidered: New Perspectives on the Abolitionists (Baton Rouge: LA: Louisiana University Press, 1979) 89. See Benj. C. Bacon (comp.), Statistics of the Colored People of Philadelphia (Philadelphia, 1856); The Christian Recorder, 9 March 1861.

[88] George, "Widening the Circle" 89; The Christian Recorder, 23 May 1863.

The Zoar Methodist Church, one of six black churches in Philadelphia by 1813, also maintained a Sunday school[89] Little is known of this Sunday school's internal workings, but a partial list of its book catalog shows that its library contained both historical and political literature, such as The History of Ancient Persia, Goldsmith's History of Greece, J. C. Moore – Slave's Friend, [illegible] Launders – Slave's Friend, Theodore [illegible] – Slave's Friend, Anti-Slavery Record, Buxton on Slavery, Liberty: The Testimony of God Against Slavery, Picture of Slavery and The Narrative of the Riot at Alton. The library also carried a significant number of bibles, testaments and hymnals, as well as primers, dictionaries, and spelling books. More conventional Sunday school material included An Abridgement to the Pilgrim's Progress, Penitent Convicts, Religious Experience, The Life of Moses, Little Frances, The Child Magazine, Charitable Children, Seeds of Greediness, The Little Deceiver, Shepard and Flock, Uncle Hugh, a Temperance Story, Blind Little Lucy, The Two Prodigals, The Glow Worm, The Life of J. Fletcher, Twinkle Star and other juvenile literature of a moral and religious nature.[90] The Zoar Sunday School also was an auxiliary of the ASSU, and according to annual reports it submitted to the Union from 1827 to 1828, the school averaged about 90 students[91]

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[89] Nash, Forging Freedom 260. W. E. B. DuBois, The Philadelphia Negro, A Social Study (Philadelphia, 1899) 199.

[90] Zoar Sabbath School – Catalogue of Books, 1844, reel #2, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia

[91] The American Sunday School Union Papers, Annual Report, 1827, Part C, xxii and Annual Report, 1828, Part C, xxv

Sunday schools attached to two African Presbyterian churches also belonged to the ASSU during this period.[92] John Gloucester, son of a slave, founded the First African Presbyterian Church in 1807, aided by the Evangelical Society (a group of Presbyterian layman).[93] Although it cannot be determined exactly when the First African Presbyterian Sunday school was initiated, the church reported an enrollment of 114 students in both 1834 and 1835.[94] The school was still operating 18 years later when the Presbytery requested statistics concerning the number of its teachers and scholars.[95]

Jacob C. White, Senior served as agent for the Sunday school connected to the Second African Presbyterian Church (organized under the name of the Lombard Street Central Presbyterian Congregation).[96] In January of 1836, with 104 students (72 male and 32 female), its managers reported that the school was "in the most flourishing condition immaginable [sic]", although only two-thirds of its students regularly attended.[97] In addition, the following month, White determined that the Sunday school

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[92] The American Sunday School Union Papers, Annual Report, 1831, Part C, 47; Annual Report, 1832, Part C, 45; Annual Report, 1834, Part C, 36; Annual Report, 1835, Part C, 42.

[93] John Gloucester, H-5, n. pag., Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia; Boylan 12.

[94] The American Sunday School Union Papers, Annual Report, 1834, Part C, 35; Annual Report, 1835, Part C, 42.

[95] Letter dated 19 September 1853, The American Negro Historical Society, Gardiner Collection, reel #7, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

[96] Lombard Street Central Presbyterian Church Session, Minutes, 1844-1864, Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia ; Letter dated 4 February 1846, The American Negro Historical Society, Gardiner Collection, reel #7.

[97] Letter dated January 1836, The American Negro Historical Society, Gardiner Collection, reel #7.

was "in want of a number of Books such as Hymn books, Bibles, Question and [illegible] books and that as far as his [White's] knowledge extended the funds of the Sunday School Society were not adequate to supply them."[98] When members met later that year to discuss plans for improving the condition of both the Sabbath school and the church, they concluded, "the congregation should support the funds of the school attached to it."[99] Significantly, they made this decision at a time when many religious bodies did not sustain Sunday schools, which were not yet seen by many people as being a legitimate extension of the church's work.[100]

It is not known whether the Second African Presbyterian Church tried to obtain funds for its Sunday school from its parent organization, the ASSU, unless the church was no longer affiliated with the Union by 1836. Black Sunday schools sometimes did receive financial assistance from umbrella organizations created expressly for that purpose. James W. C. Pennington, a Presbyterian minister with many former slaves in his New York City congregation, did secure aid from his Sunday school union.[101] Similarly, St. Phillip's Sunday School acquired bibles and prayer books from the

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[98] Letter dated 4 February 1836, The American Negro Historical Society, Gardiner Collection, reel #7.

[99] Letter dated 15 December 1836, The American Negro Historical Society, Gardiner Collection, reel #7.

[100] Tyng 136-49, 154-57; The Colored American, 30 June 1838; The Christian Recorder, 16 February 1861, 8 February 1862; The American Sunday School Union Papers, 28 May 1828, reel #212, Board of Managers Minutes, Part D and Annual Report, 1826, Part C, 85; Rice 44-45, 48-49, 56; Frank Glenn Lankard, A History of the American Sunday School Curriculum (New York: Abingdon, 1927) 65-66.

[101] R. J. M. Blackett, Beating Against the Barriers: Biographical Essays in Nineteenth-Century Afro-American History (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1986) 15; Herman Edward Thomas, James W. C. Pennington: African American Churchman & Abolitionist (New York: Garland Publishers, 1995) 82.

"Auxiliary New-York Bible and Common Prayer Book Society", although according to Peter Williams, the church's rector, the school chiefly counted on "the liberality of the congregation to sustain it."[102] Most independent black Sunday schools depended on support either from their congregations' contributions or the personal funds of church ministers. As Willis Augustus Hodges explained concerning a bible school that he started, "I went over to New York...and purchased, out of my own pocket, three dozen books, and also a lot of cards with the alphabet in large letters."[103] Hodges does not indicate whether he also served as the school's instructor.

Historian Carleton Mabee has estimated that at least 110 black Sunday schools existed in New York State from 1810 to 1860, with an approximate total enrollment of more than 8,000 students. He also has determined that most teachers in New York State's black Sunday schools were white men of some social standing.* In terms of black teachers, males constituted the majority (74%), as opposed to females, at least according to available data. The occupational breakdown of black male Sabbath school instructors was: 32% professionals (primarily teachers and ministers); 27% unskilled workers; 18% skilled workers (such as barbers and seamstresses); 16% farmers or businessmen; and 7% students.[104]

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[102] Freedom's Journal, 27 April 1827; The Colored American, 20 July 1839.

[103] William B. Gatewood, Jr., ed., Free Man of Color: The Autobiography of Willis Augustus Hodges (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1982) 52.

* Anne Boylan found that, overall, white women comprised the majority of Sunday school teachers.

[104] Mabee, Black Education in New York State 36, 38-40.

The preponderance of black males over black females as teachers by almost three to one is surprising since black women figured prominently as Sabbath school scholars by many accounts. A report stated that a black school in Philadelphia's Northern Liberties that opened in 1815 with 20 students who were mainly chimney sweeps had increased within a short period to almost 100 pupils "composed chiefly of females, from 40 to 90 years of age, who, at entering the school, knew not a letter; but now, most of them can read the scriptures..."[105] The next year, in New-London, New York, a children's Sabbath school originally was started, but that following spring, officials noted, "about sixteen coloured [sic] women were added to the school, who were from thirty to seventy years old. Some did not know their letters, and none could read intelligibly. They all seemed to think they should learn, and were grateful for the opportunity."[106] Similarly, in 1818, at School No. 4 for people of color in Troy, New York, administrators related how the performance of students had surpassed their expectations, maintaining "here, too, the praise of superior attainment, and the most uniform steady attention, is accorded to the female part of the school..."[107] And, again, at another black Sunday school in Troy, managers indicated, "there is an attendance of about fifty scholars, of all ages, from seven to fifty, the greatest proportion of whom are

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[105] Report of the Union Sabbath Schools of the Northern Liberties, The Sunday School Repository, August 1818, n. pag.

[106] Appendix to the 2nd Report of the New York Female Union Society, The Sunday School Repository, August 1818, 105.

[107] Second Annual Report of the Board of Inspectors of the Troy Sunday School Association, The Sunday School Repository, August 1818, 84.

females."[108] In 1828, according to statistics compiled by the New York Sunday-School Union, out of a total of 1,288 black Sunday school students, there were 509 males (178 adults) and 779 females (459 adults).[109] Likewise, historian Anne Boylan has concluded that black women exceeded black males in terms of Sunday school enrollment.[110]

While about 25% of all black Sabbath school teachers were females, one would have expected their numbers to be greater since school instructors often were former students.[111] More women also might have participated in this work given their overall commitment to education. Observing that women comprised "a large majority" of those gathered at the African Meeting-House in New Haven, Connecticut, a reformer once stated, "in fact, the spirit of enquiry among them...is always greater than among an equal number of males. Hence we find so many more of them engaged in the active duties of Societies."[112] Historian Robert L. Harris, Jr., in his seminal work on early black benevolent associations, also has indicated, "as a rule, females belonged to those

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[108] Troy Sunday School Union, The American Sunday School Magazine, January 1827; The American Sunday School Union Papers, Annual Report, 1827, Part C, 53.

[109] The New York Sunday-School Union, Twelfth Annual Report, June 1828, The American Sunday School Magazine 181.

[110] Boylan 23.

[111] The American Sunday School Magazine, July 1828, 211; "Report of the Second African Presbyterian Sunday School", January 1836, The American Negro Historical Society, Gardiner Collection, reel #7, n. p., The American Sunday School Union Papers, Annual Report, 1824, Part A, 24.

[112] Freedom's Journal, 17 August 1827.

voluntary associations which stressed education."[113] Indeed, in January 1832, a reformer belonging to the Pittsburgh African Education Society maintained that it was the "duty of females" to labor for black education.[114] Thus, even if they did not predominate as Sunday school teachers, it is safe to assume that they worked diligently behind the scenes promoting and organizing these institutions.

One of the defining features of the Sunday school movement was that thousands of black adults registered as students. In fact, data provided by the New York Female Society for the Promotion of Sabbath Schools reveals that black adults, in many instances, outnumbered black children as students.[115] These statistics also indicate that white adult participation in Sunday schools was limited, unlike their counterparts in Europe. In his groundbreaking study of England's Sunday school movement, historian Thomas Walter Laquer has determined that Sabbath schools there were instrumental in providing basic literacy to white industrial workers. By 1816, over 4,000 of them had enrolled in these schools, associating education with social advancement and political action.[116] Perhaps, in antebellum America, most white adults found other means of

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[113] Robert L. Harris, Jr., "Early Black Benevolent Societies, 1780-1830: The Wellspring of Afro-American Institutional Life," Africana Studies & Research Center, Cornell University, paper, 18.

[114] Dorothy B. Porter, ed., Early Negro Writing, 1760-1837 (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971) 125.

[115] Annual Reports of the New York Female Union Society, First Annual Report, 9 April 1817, 7-8, 11-13, 16; Second Annual Report, 10 May 1818, 4, 6-9, 12-13, 15; Sixth Annual Report, 3 April 1822, 4, 9; Eighth Annual Report, April 1824, 4, 20; Eleventh Annual Report, April 1827, 18, 20; "Extracts from the Second Annual Report of the New-York Female Society", September 1817, The Sunday School Repository 33, 34.

[116] Thomas Walter Laquer, Religion & Respectability: Sunday Schools and Working Class Culture, 1780-1850 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976) 90, 96, 148, 193-94, 214, 241.

acquiring an elementary education and avoided Sunday schools because of the stigma attached to charity education. For whatever reason, American Sunday schools remained predominately children's institutions, except for the thousands of northern black adults who opted to pursue religious instruction.[117]

Historian Carter G. Woodson has stated that a desire to read the Scriptures induced many free blacks to join the Sunday school movement.[118] Indeed, administrators of School No.11 in New York City found, "the coloured [sic] adults are particularly anxious to be instructed in the truths of the Gospel."[119] One black pupil who supported herself through daily labor saved 50 cents a week to purchase a bible costing $28.00.[120] However, Sunday schools also provided the rudiments of an elementary education at a time when free blacks were precluded from studying in other institutions.[121] Some white reformers showed sensitivity to these special circumstances when discussing whether it was appropriate to teach black adults arithmetic. They acknowledged, many older pupils "know nothing about figures...the want of which, deprives numbers [of them] from obtaining a decent livelihood in large cities and villages. Such persons are necessarily, in many instances, compelled to draw out their

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[117] Boylan 133, 141.

[118] Carter G. Woodson, The Education of the Negro Prior to 1861 (New York: Arno Press, 1968) 221.

[119] Annual Reports of the New York Female Union Society, Eleventh Annual Report, April 1827, 10; Annual Report, 9 April 1817, 16.

[120] Ibid., Eleventh Annual Report, April 1827, 10.

[121] Woodson, The Education of the Negro Prior to 1861 124; David E. Swift, Black Prophets of Justice: Activist Clergy Before the Civil War (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989) 32, 280.

lives in penury, and not unfrequently [sic] in abject poverty." One reformer conceded, "while the knowledge of figures is not necessary for salvation; yet it is unquestionably indispensable for the greater part of employments in a civil community." After he visited a black Sabbath school in New York City and found that most African Americans "depended entirely on Sunday schools for their instruction", he "introduced writing and ciphering, on two evenings in the week..."[122] Likewise, a debate ensued over teaching blacks arithmetic at a meeting of the Association of Male Sunday School Teachers, also in New York City. When opponents argued that it was improper to teach anything but religious instruction on Sundays, a meeting participant responded:

> The study of common arithmetic [is] calculated to expand the mind; and a great many persons, particularly among our coloured [sic] population, [have] no other means of acquiring this kind of instruction, so necessary to enable them to pursue the common duties of life...that so far from being a breach of the Sabbath, it ought to be classed among the acts of mercy.

Another member commented:

> If the knowledge of arithmetic [is] a <u>good</u> thing, it [is] lawful to teach it, because it is lawful to <u>do good</u> on the Sabbath day. There are many religious subjects which can not be understood, or even examined, without the use of numbers...but care should be taken as to the <u>motives</u> with which it is taught. <u>Religion</u> alone should be the ground.

After further deliberation, he finally concluded that Sunday schools were intended to prepare students for salvation, not useful employment. Also deciding that arithmetic could be taught on other days of the week, the association censured teaching it.[123]

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[122] "On Teaching Arithmetic in Sunday Schools." <u>The American Sunday School Magazine</u>, April 1825, 115-16.

[123] "Teaching Arithmetic in Sunday Schools." <u>The American Sunday School Magazine</u>, February 1825, 78-79.

Despite continued resistance to offering secular education, Sunday schools still became important disseminators of nonreligious information for African Americans. Acknowledging this tradition in its History of Schools for the Colored Population, the U.S. Office of Education stated, "black Sabbath schools differed from white Sabbath schools in that [they] embraced young and old and most of the time [were] not devoted to studying the Bible but learning to read."[124] Indeed, although Sunday schools clearly were established to facilitate conversion, literacy for its own sake spurred many blacks to join the movement, forcing school officials to repeatedly remind them to keep sight of its central purpose. The fact that some African Americans pursued bible studies who already belonged to black churches also supports the view that they sought literacy, not conversion.[125]

Philadelphia's black religious community certainly promoted secular education, organizing adult evening classes in reading, writing, and arithmetic, as well as in English grammar, Latin, geography, and natural philosophy. In addition, black women were taught needlework and drawing.[126] In New York City, black churches opened their doors to adults for evening instruction by offering them accommodations in the basements of their buildings.[127]

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[124] U.S. Office of Education – History of Schools for the Colored Population, n.p., 1969, 221.

[125] Annual Reports of the New York Female Union Society, 10 May 1818, 15.

[126] Freedom's Journal, 26 September 1828, 10 October 1828, 12 December 1828.

[127] Ibid., 28 September 1827.

Several leading abolitionists (including Henry H. Garnet, Charles Ray and Theodore Wright) also operated Sunday schools containing adult learners.[128] In fact, some black activists had been educated themselves in these institutions.[129] Reverend Wright's Sunday school was committed to immediate abolitionism. Run by the school's superintendent, shoemaker William P. Johnson, it had its own juvenile antislavery association.[130] Black students apparently were taught to engage in community activism: in 1842, two black Sunday schools in Philadelphia joined together to publicly commemorate West Indian abolition.[131]

Self-taught abolitionist Austin Steward, a former slave and grocer, equated Sunday schools with empowerment. For a brief period, he had operated his own Sabbath school, acting as its instructor, but he explained:

> The parents interested themselves very little in the undertaking, and it shortly came to nought. [sic] So strong was the prejudice against the colored people, that very few of the Negroes seemed to have any courage or ambition to rise from the abject degradation in which the estimation of the white man had placed him.

Nonetheless, at his 1827 address celebrating the abolition of slavery in New York State, Steward continued to promote religious instruction, calling Sabbath schools "the most useful of all institutions" because through them blacks could become literate, ultimately

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[128] Swift, Black Prophets of Justice 47, 152, 159; Joel Schor, Henry Highland Garnet: A Voice of Black Radicalism in the Nineteenth Century (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977) 163.

[129] Reverend J. W. Loguen, The Reverend J. W. Loguen, As A Slave & As A Freeman. 1859. (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1968) 340; Blackett 9.

[130] Mabee, Black Education in New York State 44.

[131] Letter addressed to Mr. White, 9 July 1842, American Negro Historical Society, Gardiner Collection, reel #7, n. p.

leading them to wealth and influence. He asserted, "money, even in your hands, is power: with it you may direct as you will the actions of your proud brethren – the pale population of the country! Seek after and amass it then, by just and honorable means..." In this way, blacks could achieve "rank and standing" in the land of their captivity.[132]

Conclusion

Many free blacks attended Sunday schools for other than religious purposes, hoping to acquire practical skills that might alleviate their harsh existence. Even elderly African Americans who could no longer use literacy to secure employment pursued it because it held intrinsic value for them. By the 1830s, with the rise of public education, white-run Sabbath schools began to focus less on providing basic instruction, prompting blacks to form their own institutions.[133] However, according to Mabee, the curricula of even black Sunday schools became increasingly religious oriented, so much so that by the 1860s, they no longer afforded most Africans Americans with a rudimentary education. Again, this function now fell to the public school system.[134]

While it is true that educational opportunities for African Americans had expanded, their ability to participate in conventional schooling continued to be limited. Many were bound out to service or were otherwise engaged in weekly employment, and

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[132] Austin Steward, Twenty-two Years a Slave and Forty Years a Freeman. 1856. (New York: Negro Universities Press, n.d.) 13, 82, 132, 158-161; Freedom's Journal, 27 July 1827.

[133] Lankard 64, 66; Boylan 24-26, 167; Mabee, Black Education in New York State 47; Graham Russell Hodges, Root & Branch: African Americans in New York & East Jersey, 1613-1863 (Chapel Hill: University of South Carolina Press, 1999) 242.

[134] Mabee, Black Education in New York State 47.

black Sunday schools probably continued to reflect these realities in their educational programs. Traditionally, black church-related organizations have demonstrated institutional flexibility, providing services to meet the special needs of the free black community, which suggests that the shift from secular to religious subjects perhaps was less dramatic than has been documented. In fact, one source has indicated that the African Methodist Episcopal Church Sunday School Union used spelling books for religious instruction as late as 1884.[135] And in the 1860s, at a meeting to organize a Colored American Sabbath School Union, members stated that the association's objective would be to promote the religious and intellectual development of black children. In doing so, they wished to create "a Sabbath school literature original with ourselves, and suited to our own circumstances and condition."[136] Theirs would be a Sunday school of their own making that would continue to provide secular training.

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[135] Boylan 29.

[136] The Christian Recorder, 13 April 1861.

CHAPTER 5

"A SPECIES OF SLAVERY": INDENTURED CHILDREN OF BLACKS BORN FREE

Antislavery societies formed during the early national period not only focused on the abolition of slavery; they assumed responsibility for the welfare of free blacks living in northern cities, helping them to secure employment, education, housing, and legal services.[1] Yet, these societies also sought to enhance the public image of free blacks by ameliorating their condition, and humanitarian efforts were part of an overall plan to promote their moral development. The ultimate goal was to make the general public more amenable to abolition, disproving the belief that African Americans were a vice ridden people inherently lacking the ability to cope with freedom.

To counter claims that immorality truly typified the free black community, antislavery societies surveyed the households of free black populations in Philadelphia and New York City. They compiled comprehensive statistics on their occupations and businesses, property holdings and other assets, their membership in churches and community organizations, and any black children attending school or bound out to service.[2] Based on this data, the Pennsylvania Abolition Society (PAS) determined that

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[1] The Pennsylvania Abolition Society Papers, General Meeting Minute Book, reel #1, n. pag. and Committee for Improving the Condition of Free Blacks, 1790-1803, reel #6, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia; The New York Manumission Society Records, reel #2, 10 April 1804 and vol. 1, reel #1, 15 November 1787, 21 February 1788, New York Historical Society, New York City. The New York Manumission Society founded the African Free Schools for black children in New York City in 1787.

[2] The Pennsylvania Abolition Society Papers, Committee for Improving the Condition of Free Blacks, 1790-1803, reel #6, 20 September 1790, 30 November 1795, also page 274; The New York Manumission Society Records, Report of the Committee for Preventing Irregular Conduct in Free Negroes, reel #1, vol. 1, 21 February 1788.

free blacks generally lived "orderly, decently and comfortably", with many of them owning houses and other valuable property. Free blacks also often supported elderly relatives and destitute children.[3] Furthermore, most of them professed "some system of Religion" and regularly attended church services. Basically, the PAS concluded that they were comparable to the white lower classes in terms of moral condition.[4]

However, despite assurances to the broader community that most African Americans lived peaceably, many reformers themselves believed that the character of free blacks naturally tended toward extravagance and merriment, if not outright criminality. To curb these proclivities, antislavery agencies established special "inspection" committees that visited free blacks in their homes, churches, community organizations and places of entertainment, instructing them on the value of moral improvement.[5] Particularly concerned with issues of propriety and deportment, reformers cautioned free blacks not to disturb the peace by congregating in "large numbers", and warned against "Fiddling, Dancing or any noisy Entertainment in their Houses."[6] Circulars and addresses especially targeted the population's more

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[3] Pennsylvania Abolition Society Papers, General Meeting Minute Book, reel #1, 21 March 1801.

[4] Ibid., The Committee for Improving the Condition of Free Blacks, reel #6, 25 September 1790, n. pag., 1 April 1791, p. 27, 30 November 1795, p. 112; General Meeting Minute Book, reel #1, 21 March 1801.

[5] The New York Manumission Society Records, Report of the Committee for Preventing Irregular Conduct in Free Negroes, reel #1, 21 February 1788, reel #2, 14 January 1806; The Pennsylvania Abolition Society Papers, General Meeting Minute, reel #1, 21 March 1801; Committee for Improving the Condition of Free Blacks, reel #6, 20 September 1790, 30 November 1795, 10 August 1797, 25 March 1799; Committee to Improve the African Race, Minute Book, reel #8, 1837-1853 and 27 September 1843.

[6] The Pennsylvania Abolition Society Papers, The Committee for Improving the Condition of Free Blacks, reel #6, 10 August 1797, p. 154; The New York Manumission Society Records, Report of the Committee for Preventing the Irregular Conduct in Free Negroes, reel #1, 21 February 1788.

"disorderly" segment, admonishing them to conduct themselves with circumspection lest they hurt the cause of abolition.[7] At the same time, antislavery agencies felt very uneasy about the impact of freed slaves on civil society, ordering its committees "to keep a watchful Eye over the Conduct of such Negroes as have been or may hereafter be Liberated" to prevent them from sinking into "habits of idleness" and immorality.[8]

Notwithstanding their concerns, New York State's gradual emancipation law actually did not release any slaves from bondage. It only freed the children of slaves born after the bill's passage that took effect on July 4, 1799, but the law also required that these children become indentured servants, discharging females at age 25 and males at 28.[9] However, in 1817, the state legislature decided to set all slaves free (not indentured servants) on the fourth of July 1827. On that date, there were 20,279 free blacks and 10,092 slaves in the state.[10]

Pennsylvania passed the nation's first emancipation bill in 1780, and like New York's initial law, it too did not free a single bondsperson. Instead, all children born to slaves after March 1 of that year would serve 28 years as indentured servants, providing

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[7] The Pennsylvania Abolition Society Papers, General Meeting Minute Book, reel #1, 21 June 1800, 6-8; n.d. 29-30, 100-102, 274, 283.

[8] The New York Manumission Society Records, vol. 1, reel #1, 11 August 1785.

[9] Shane White, Somewhat More Independent: The End of Slavery in NYC, 1770-1810 (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991) 38.

[10] Narratives of Colored Americans (New York, 1882) 263.

they were registered as such with the county government.[11] When total abolition was finally accomplished in 1847, unlike New York, slavery already was virtually extinct in Pennsylvania.[12] Census records reflect that only 211 slaves resided there by 1820.[13] The number of slaves in Philadelphia already had been reduced by half between 1767 and 1775 due primarily to the inability of the slave population to reproduce itself, but also resulting from manumissions.[14] In fact, only 55 slaves remained in that city by the end of the eighteenth century.[15] At the same time, between 1790 and 1820, the number of free blacks in Pennsylvania more than quadrupled, rising from 6,537 to 32,153 people.[16]

Antislavery societies assumed the task of assimilating these populations into the larger community. Aside from advocating abolition, they facilitated and kept account of manumissions, aided those illegally held as bondsmen, promoted education, and found employment for free born blacks and those recently emancipated. But white

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[11] Nash and Sunderland, Freedom by Degrees 111; Daniel Meaders, Dead or Alive: Fugitive Slaves and White Indentured Servants Before 1830 (New York: Garland Publishing, 1993) 16; Gary B. Nash, Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988) 63.

[12] Meaders 16; Nash and Sunderland, Freedom by Degrees 102, 111; Nash, Forging Freedom, 63; Julie P. Winch, Philadelphia's Black Elite: Activism, Accommodation, and the Struggle for Autonomy, 1787-1848 (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988) 70.

[13] Arthur Zilversmit, The First Emancipation: The Abolition of Slavery in the North (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967) 207.

[14] Nash, Forging Freedom 33-34.

[15] Billy G. Smith, The "Lower Sort": Philadelphia's Laboring People, 1750-1800 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990) 193.

[16] Winch 17-18.

abolitionists took a special interest in black children, fearing they would "inherit the vices" and ignorance of their parents.[17] To avert this risk, antislavery agencies in both Pennsylvania and New York established schools for black children. This effort was most visible in New York City where the New York Manumission Society started the African Free Schools in 1787, but the PAS undertook similar educational measures around the same time in Philadelphia.[18] However, most youngsters did not attend these institutions. Indeed, in 1804 and 1806, the PAS closed two of its schools for want of pupils.[19] The problem was that poverty compelled many parents to indenture their children enabling them to go to school only when they were out of a situation.[20]

Apprenticeships Through Antislavery Societies

The PAS organized the system of free black indentures by collecting many of them from the various agencies responsible for facilitating and holding these contracts (namely, city magistrates, the Overseers of the Poor and the Philadelphia House of Employment).[21] At the same time, in 1790, the PAS, through its Committee of

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[17] The New York Manumission Society Records, vol. 1, reel #1, 21 February 1788, p. 97; The Pennsylvania Abolition Society Papers, Committee for Improving the Condition of Free Blacks, reel #6, p. 220, reel #1, General Meeting Minute Book, 25 May 1815, p. 219.

[18] The New York Manumission Society Records, vol. 1, reel #1, 15 November 1787. p. 87; 21 February 1788, p. 97; reel #2, 10 April 1804; Report of the Committee for Preventing Irregular Conduct in Free Negroes, vol. 1, reel #1, 21 February 1788; The Pennsylvania Abolition Society, General Meeting Minute Book, reel #1, n.d., p. 98, 208, 354; reel #6, Committee for Improving the Condition of Free Blacks, 1790-1803; reel #25, A Committee of Education, 26 October 1789.

[19] Nash, Forging Freedom 206.

[20] Nash and Sunderland, Freedom by Degrees 191; B. Smith 166.

[21] The Pennsylvania Abolition Society, Committee for Improving the Condition of Free Blacks, Reel #6, XR 572.

Guardians, began placing black youth with "Suitable Persons", favoring farmers and mechanics.[22] The agency was adamant in its preference. In a draft address to free blacks in 1800, it cautioned, "Be particular in placing your children – Let them be taught useful trades or be farmers rather than house-Servants."[23] Like the PAS, the New York Manumission Society also bound black children. It too "strongly recommended agricultural pursuits" at its public meeting in New York City for free black parents, believing that employment requiring an appreciation of nature was far more conducive to moral improvement than other occupations.[24] In 1818, the Society again expressed its intention to bind out free blacks, giving preference to "application[s] from Farmers and Mechanicks [sic]." The agency also agreed to "advance small capital" to the city's black tradesmen in exchange for their accepting students from the African Free Schools as apprentices.[25]

Black abolitionists had mixed feelings about the need for free blacks to indenture their offspring since this practice deprived many youth of formal schooling. Yet, it also might afford them training in skilled occupations, provided they were bound

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[22] The Pennsylvania Abolition Society, reel #25, "A Plan for Improving the Condition of Free Blacks", 26 October 1789, (Miscellaneous); reel #6, Committee for Improving the Condition of Free Blacks, Report of the Committee of Guardians, 20 September 1790.

[23] Ibid., Draft of An Address to Free Blacks, General Meeting Minute Book, reel #1, 21 June 1800.

[24] The New York Manumission Society Records, reel #1, n.d.

[25] Ibid., Report of the Trustees of the African Free Schools, Reel #1, 14 April 1818.

out as apprentices and not treated as servants.[26] Ideally, unlike the indentured status of slaves' children, free black apprentices voluntarily entered into contracts for a specified period to be taught a trade in exchange for their labor. At the end of their service, they were entitled to "freedom dues", which might include money, clothes, or tools.[27] These apprenticeships marked a significant departure from the colonial period when free blacks unwillingly were bound out by local authorities usually for their inability to support themselves or for criminal offenses. Orphan's court similarly placed poor black children of deceased parents.[28] These black indentured servants virtually were owned by their masters, typically performing the same work as slaves.[29]

Indentures arranged via antislavery agencies thus provided new opportunities for free blacks to secure respectable employment. Occupational training also was a central tenet of the black moral reform movement, regarded as essential to a meaningful education by black abolitionists.[30] They saw the acquisition of skilled trades as a means of self-help and racial advancement, insisting "we must not only be able to black boots,

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[26] Edward Raymond Turner, The Negro In Pennsylvania: Slavery-Servitude-Freedom, 1639-1861 (Washington, D.C.: n.p., 1911) 92-93, 99-100;

[27] Sharon Y. Salinger, "To Serve Well and Faithfully": Labor and Indentured Servants in Pennsylvania 1682-1800 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) 6-7, 10; Herrick 205.

[28] Herrick 91; Turner 91-92, 102-03, 111.

[29] Turner 96, 98.

[30] Philip S. Foner and George E. Walker, eds., Proceedings of the Black State Conventions, 1840-1865, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1979) Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania Convention, 1841,vol. 1 109; C. Peter Ripley, ed., The Black Abolitionist Papers, 5 vols (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1986) vol. 2, 12 July 1831, 105.

but to make them".[31] Whites had become so accustomed to seeing blacks perform common labor that it had become "a badge of degradation" associated with enslavement, making "every colored mechanic" automatically "an elevator of his race".[32] Thus, reformers advised free blacks to "leave the blacking rooms, horse stables, steamboats, washtubs and other menial employments", binding their children "under colored mechanics" whenever possible.[33] Black newspapers even announced when apprenticeships became available.[34]

However, black reformers increasingly endorsed agricultural training, calling on free blacks to emigrate from the cities where competition from whites prevented them from finding suitable work.[35] More to the point, most white mechanics would not hire free blacks nor instruct their children as apprentices, leading reformers to believe that of all white occupational groups, mechanics were especially hostile to blacks' interests.[36]

In contrast, reformers maintained that they would encounter less racism in rural regions

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[31] Howard H. Bell, ed., Minutes of the Proceedings of the National Negro Conventions, 1830-1864 (New York: Arno Press, 1969), 1848 National Convention Minutes 37; Carol Lasser, Mistress, Maid and Market: The Transformation of Domestic Service in New England, 1790-1870 (Photocopy Ann Arbor Michigan: University Microfilms International, 1985) 221-22.

[32] Bell, ed., 1848 National Convention Minutes 19.

[33] Foner and Walker, eds., Columbus, Ohio Convention, 1851, vol.1, 267.

[34] Ibid., The Colored American, 30 September 1837, 17 February 1838, 1 June 1839, 20 July 1839.

[35] Lewis Woodson to Samuel E. Cornish, 7 February 1838, ed. Ripley, vol. 3, 256-58; Bell, ed. 1843 National Convention Minutes 31, 34-35; Foner and Walker, eds., Cincinnati, Ohio Convention, 1852, vol. 1, 277, 280; Chicago, Illinois Convention, 1853, vol. 2, 60; New England Convention, 1859, vol. 2, 216.

[36] Bell, ed., 1853 National Convention Minutes 37; 1834 National Convention Minutes 26-27; 1835 National Convention Minutes 15; Frederick Douglass Paper, 23 December 1853.

because farming inherently tended toward equality of condition.[37] They reasoned: "the community is a community of farmers. Their occupations are the same; their hopes and interests the same; they occupy a similar position in society; the one is not above the other".[38] These reformers assumed that status and privilege bore no relation to skin color.

However, reformers who were less trusting of rural class relations preferred that blacks settle in their own ethnic enclaves. At the black national convention held in Buffalo, New York in 1843, the Committee of Agriculture submitted the following relocation plan:

> Let 20 families, more or less, with health, habits of industry, and economy, with intelligence, a sound moral and religious character... who agree... on all great questions of fundamental morality unite together, not to...have things in common, but to settle, each adjoining the other, on his own purchased farm, and thus form one neighborhood; and let them unite together in all matters of public interest that are for the good of the whole; such as schools, and churches, roads and bridges... and where it can be, we would not object to a few white families...[39]

Yet, others questioned the prudence of forming black farming districts. One reformer asked, " May we safely suppose that a government which has shown such decided hostility towards us as individuals, would regard us with a more indulgent eye, when formed into communities, acquiring intelligence, wealth and power?"[40]

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[37] Foner and Walker, eds., Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania Convention, 1841, vol. 1, 115.

[38] Bell, ed., 1843 National Convention Minutes 30, 32; 1847 National Convention Minutes 29.

[39] Ibid., 1843 National Convention Minutes 35-36.

[40] Lewis Woodson to Samuel Cornish, February 7, 1838, ed. Ripley, vol. 3, 257.

Moreover, free blacks were uncertain whether they could even purchase western land from the government. Several claimed that nothing precluded them from legally owning property anywhere in the country, citing the location of several large black farms, particularly in western Pennsylvania and Ohio.[41] Nonetheless, these reformers also noted that land was only available because many territories had not yet enacted state constitutions restricting sales to white Americans; and, by 1853, they requested "the word 'white' be struck from the preemption act."[42]

Furthermore, even if farmland were accessible, most free blacks were decidedly averse to settling in the country when they could enjoy "each other's society" in the cities.[43] Urban centers provided them with a sense of cultural containment in the form of their own schools, churches and charitable organizations. Perhaps they feared the isolation and vulnerability that rural living might bring.[44] A reformer once commented, free blacks would "endure any amount of hardship and privation, rather than separate, and go into the country" where they might become targets of white yeoman disfavor.[45] Many free blacks, in fact, had emigrated to northern urban communities to escape the vigilante violence and forced labor practices occurring in more rural areas.

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[41] Bell, ed., 1847 National Convention Minutes 29; Foner and Walker, eds., Sacramento, California Convention, 1855, vol. 2, 119-20, 130.

[42] Bell, ed., 1843 National Convention Minutes 35; 1853 National Convention Minutes 10.

[43] Lewis Woodson to Samuel Cornish, February 7, 1838, ed. Ripley, vol. 3, 257.

[44] Bell, ed., 1853 National Convention Minutes 36.

[45] Bell, ed., 1853 National Convention Minutes 35.

Establishing farms in the west also required a level of expertise and capital that many free blacks did not possess.[46] Abolitionist Gerrit Smith donated 120,000 acres of his own land in Elba, New York for the use of free blacks in 1846, but the inferior soil, harsh environment and inexperience of the settlers ultimately hindered many free blacks from permanently settling the land.[47] Nonetheless, black reformers touted agriculture as the surest way for free blacks to gain wealth, prestige and independence. They also continued to promote apprenticeships in skilled occupations, despite difficulty in finding white employers willing to provide instruction.[48]

Moreover, black parents were reluctant to place their offspring, concerned that their children would be mistreated. In 1839, New York's Colored American reported that only a few boys were apprenticed to craftsmen, explaining "the fault lies in great measure with the parents. They are averse to binding their children, and are generally too fearful that they would be ill-used by white mechanics."[49] One reformer even reprimanded black parents for being overly sensitive. In severe language, he indicated:

> Perhaps he is sent to a trade; but in a week or two his parents take him away. – Why? Because his master or a journeyman struck him, (for impudence perhaps) or because they gave him some menial duty to perform, or because he did not receive a handsome suit of clothes, or because they gave him course food, or because someone in the shop called him nigger! It is melancholy to observe, how much colored

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[46] Bell, ed., Rochester, New York, 1853, 35.

[47] Ripley, ed., vol. 3, 482n; vol. 4, 42.

[48] Bell, ed., 1847 National Convention Minutes 27, 30; 1843 National Convention Minutes 30-32; Foner and Walker, eds., Cincinatti, Ohio Convention, 1852, vol. 1, 280; Chicago, Illinois Convention, 1853, vol. 2, 60; Sacramento, California Convention, 1855, vol. 2, 130.

[49] The Colored American, 3 August 1839.

> parents value their children's appearance and feelings above their best interests...let him go in rags and live on crusts of bread and cold water, so long as he can learn a trade, which in manhood will support him well...[50]

Yet, many parents were determined to keep and protect their children, especially given their recent history of enslavement. In fact, one of the first acts performed by freed blacks was to liberate their loved ones so that they could live as families.[51]

In 1817, after trying for several years to indenture black children, the PAS also spoke of parents' resistance to placing their offspring. The agency's Apprenticing Committee:

> ...had been able to bind out but a very small number owing to the disinclination of the coloured [sic] people, to put their children out until they can keep them no longer, and then the committee is applied to; and when a suitable place for the child was provided, the parents had perhaps moved away and could not be found, or had otherwise disposed of the child.[52]

However, since the PAS sought the "most advantageous" contracts and monitored the conditions under which indentured youngsters lived, it did gain the consent of some parents to place their children, beginning in 1790.[53] The New York Manumission Society also began binding free blacks around the same period and, like the PAS, it continued to do so as late as the 1820s. Various other agencies indentured black

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[50] The Colored American, 11 March 1839.

[51] B. Smith 194.

[52] Edward Needles, The Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery. 1848. (New York: Arno Press, 1969) 64-65.

[53] Nash, Forging Freedom 159; The Pennsylvania Abolition Society Papers, reel #6, Committee of Guardians, Minute Book, vol. 2, 27 March 1798, 46; The Pennsylvania Abolition Society Papers, reel #25, miscellaneous, "A Plan for Improving the Condition of the Free Blacks", 26 October 1789.

children well beyond mid-century.[54] Throughout this period, antislavery organizations received scores of complaints about the terms of indentures and the treatment of black children; and the substance of their grievances explains why parents resisted apprenticing their offspring.

Indentured Servants

The fact that the PAS took in numerous applications from "Persons wishing to Employ colored in preference to white Children" is a clear indication that employers wanted servants rather than apprentices. Their preference partially reflected the changing nature of the work force. By the end of the eighteenth century, as the region shifted from a condition of labor scarcity to one of labor surplus, it became cheaper to hire short-term wageworkers than to maintain a bound labor force.[55] This meant that indentured individuals increasingly were employed as domestic servants at the same time that there was a growing demand for their services.[56] These circumstances were further aggravated for the progeny of free blacks. Unfortunately, whites associated them with slaves' children who could be held for extended periods as indentured servants.

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[54] Herrick 265.

[55] Salinger 4, 6, 148, 152; Herrick 265; Sidney I. Pomerantz, New York, An American City, 1783-1803: A Study of Urban Life (Port Washington, NY: I. J. Friedman, 1965) 220.

[56] Salinger 138; Leslie Maria Harris, "Creating the African American Working Class: Black and White Workers, Abolitionists and Reformers in New York City, 1785-1863," diss., Stanford University, 1995, 30; Pomerantz 220.

Many free blacks, in fact, that were legally placed as apprentices were bound and treated as servants.[57] The employer of one boy indentured to learn a trade flatly stated that there was "no probability" of his teaching his apprentice the carpenter's business, prompting the PAS to find him another situation. Furthermore, his master refused to give him up when the agency went to retrieve him.[58] The employer of another youth originally bound as an apprentice later wanted "an Indenture on him as a Servant", going directly against the mother's wishes.[59] Likewise, a guardian complained that a child was "bound for a term of 9 years as a servant and not as an apprentice."[60] In 1855, noting the unwillingness of parents to place their children, a black reformer explained, "I think the chances for them to obtain situations as apprentices, very few and difficult."[61] The House of Refuge for Colored Children in Philadelphia also was unable to secure apprenticeships for black boys leaving its agency.[62]

While the New York Manumission Society had similar trouble finding skilled situations for black children, it was not fully committed to this undertaking from the

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[57] The Pennsylvania Abolition Society Papers, reel #1, General Minutes, 1794; Turner 106.

[58] The Pennsylvania Abolition Society Papers, reel #6, Committee of Guardians, Minute Book, vol. 2, 7 March 1797, p. 9; 21 March 1797, p. 10; 13 June 1797, p. 19.

[59] Ibid., reel #1, General Minutes, 1794, n. pag.; reel #6, Minute Book, vol. 1, 1790-1796, 72.

[60] Ibid., reel #8, Committee to Improve the African Race, Minute Book, 1837-1853, n. pag.

[61] Bell, ed., 1855 National Convention 16.

[62] Cecile P. Frey, "The House of Refuge for Colored Children," The Journal of Negro History 66 (Spring 1981): 20.

beginning. In 1805, John Jay, prominent diplomat and jurist who also was associated with both the African Free Schools and the Manumission Society, angered black parents when he intimated that their children would be better off as domestics in white families. In his estimation, whites were better equipped to provide black youth with a moral education.[63] Indeed, one historian has identified the Manumission Society as the primary source for providing white households with adult black servants, acting much like an employment agency in this respect.[64] Similarly, in 1801, the PAS reported that 59 whites had applied to it for servants, but the agency had difficulty permanently filling these positions due to the "fickle" disposition of free blacks. It seems they only would work as domestics for short periods and then quit.[65]

Free black parents also complained that their children did not receive schooling as stipulated by the terms of their indentures. In 1788, New York required that apprenticed children be taught reading and writing as part of the poor law, and a similar regulation was passed in Pennsylvania in 1810 compelling masters to provide apprentices with six weeks of schooling for every year of service.[66] These requirements were one of the few redeeming features of many labor contracts, especially for free blacks bound out as servants. Some parents only consented to indenture their children

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[63] L. Harris 81.

[64] Robert J. Swan, "John Teasman: African-American Educator and the Emergence of Community in Early Black New York City, 1787-1815," Journal of the Early Republic 12 (Fall 1992): 342.

[65] The Pennsylvania Abolition Society Papers, reel #6, Committee for Improving the Condition of Free Blacks, 26 March 1801, n. pag.

[66] Herrick 263; Pomerantz 423.

on the condition that they were educated. One servant agreed to have his thirteen-year-old son placed by the Overseers of the Poor "to give him schooling."[67] Another woman asked the PAS to find her "a suitable place where she may be taught reading, writing and some Arithmetic", as well as housekeeping.[68] However, educator Edward Everett, in a survey conducted in 1855, found that education usually was not provided for indentured children in both New York and Massachusetts, and the same situation probably prevailed in Pennsylvania.[69] Indeed, one free couple that wanted their bound daughter to attend a school run by the PAS complained that the girl's master refused "giving [her] any learning."[70] Another man charged that two of his apprenticed sons were denied both schooling and clothing.[71]

Length of Service and Treatment

Other apprentices were held beyond the expiration of their terms. Samuel Samuels' mother had him bound until he reached 21 years of age, but his master wanted him to serve until 28, holding him illegally for seven more years.[72] Likewise, the

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[67] The Pennsylvania Abolition Society Papers, reel #6, Committee of Guardians, Minute Book, vol. 1, 17 September 1790, 11.

[68] Ibid., reel #6, Committee of Guardians, Minute Book, vol. 1, 12 December 1790, 171.

[69] Dennis Clark, "Babes in Bondage: Indentured Irish Children in Philadelphia in the 19th Century," Pennsylvania Magazine of History & Biography 101 (October 1977): 484.

[70] The Pennsylvania Abolition Society Papers, Committee of Guardians, Minute Book, vol. 1, 10 June 1796, 167; The American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, Minutes 1797, 32, The Schomberg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York City.

[71] The Pennsylvania Abolition Society Papers, reel #6, Committee of Guardians, Minute Book, vol. 2, n.d., 37.

[72] The New York Manumission Society Records, reel #2, vol. 10, 14 May 1818, 296.

Overseers of the Poor placed Maria Johnson to serve until she was 18, but she was still held after her time had expired. "Charles" also was apprenticed until he was 21, but his master "sold" him to another individual who forced him to serve longer.[73] In fact, a defining feature of free black apprenticeships was the length of service. Indentured white boys and girls bound out by the Overseers of the Poor or other public agencies served until they were 21 and 18, respectively, whereas white children voluntarily apprenticed worked on average about seven years.[74] During the colonial period, white apprentices overall were bound for four years, and white servants generally were given the same length of service.[75] Although indentures for free blacks varied widely during this era (ranging anywhere from four to 24 years), they usually served for at least 14 years and these long-term indentures extended into the post-War period.[76] For instance, in 1794, the PAS bound two free blacks, each for 16 years as servants. At the same time, they placed a ten-year-old (also as a domestic) for only six years, but his length of service was unusual.[77] One study indicates that from 1782 to 1810, the average indenture of 91 free blacks bound by the Philadelphia House of Employment was 13

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[73] Ibid., reel #2, vol. 11, 10 March 1821, 98.

[74] Nash and Sunderland, Freedom by Degrees 194-95; Henry B. Fearon, Sketches of America (London, 1818) 33.

[75] Turner 99, 103; Richard R. Wright, Jr., The Negro in Pennsylvania: A Study in Economic History. 1912. (New York: Arno Press and The New York Times, 1969) 8; Herrick 35, 51, 200.

[76] Turner 99-100; Wright 8.

[77] The Pennsylvania Abolition Society Papers, reel #6, Committee of Guardians, Minute Book, vol. 1, 17 August 1794, 22 September 1794.

years; while the remaining 2,454 free blacks placed by the PAS served on average 10.6 years.[78]

The length of some indentures was extraordinary. In 1795, an employer transported a 29-year-old free black woman and her son from New Jersey to Kings County, New York, where they were sold for 70 pounds and bound for 30 years to a new owner.[79] Similarly, a black man aged approximately 26 was indentured for 20 years. The Manumission Society considered it a sale under the guise of an indenture and investigated.[80] In Philadelphia, white labor contractors sometimes paid black parents small sums of money to apprentice their children; then the new masters would sell them to the highest bidder.[81] Another man reported that several black families in his neighborhood had their children "stolen from them by persons whom they know", and bound out to service until they were 28 years old.[82]

Free blacks often were deceived by those presumed to be well meaning. An intelligence office in Philadelphia tricked one black woman into signing papers before a magistrate on the pretext that a Philadelphia merchant was hiring her as a free worker. When she tried to collect her wages, she discovered that she had been indented as a

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[78] Salinger 147.

[79] The New York Manumission Society Records, reel #1, 3 May 1796, 95.

[80] Ibid., reel #1, 31 May 1796, 64.

[81] Nash and Sunderland, Freedom by Degrees 199.

[82] The New York Manumission Society Records, reel #2, vol. 10, 3 July 1818.

servant for a five-year period. Her employer had paid $150.00 dollars for her.[83] More serious consequences awaited other fraud victims. It became commonplace in Philadelphia for white men to approach black parents offering them favorable indentures for their children, but once these youngsters were apprenticed, their whereabouts became unknown. Ten-year-old Mariah Rose was transported upstate from New York City without parental consent, leaving her mother "very anxious to have her child brought back."[84] Likewise, Jane Humphreys placed her daughter with an employer in New York City who transferred her to another person living 200 miles away. The mother "is distressed about it", the Manumission Society noted.[85] And Jane Teaman's 14 year-old put out as a servant to a Miss Hale in Greenwich "had disposed of her in some way that she [was] not willing to inform the mother."[86] The mistress of Clarissa Farrow's missing daughter also "declined giving any information respecting her."[87] Many children were "sold" to other masters then carried out of their jurisdictions, making them virtually impossible to trace.[88] One Negro Pegg was placed with multiple parties, and then taken out of the state.

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[83] Daniel Meaders, Dead or Alive: Fugitive Slaves and White Indentured Servants Before 1830 (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1993) 275.

[84] The New York Manumission Society Records, reel #2, vol. 11, 5 June 1821, 106.

[85] Ibid., reel #2, vol. 10, n.d., 162.

[86] Ibid., reel #2, vol. 11, 11 November 1828, 174.

[87] Ibid., reel #2, vol. 11, 11 November 1828, 175.

[88] Turner 107; The Pennsylvania Abolition Society Papers, reel #6, Committee for Improving the Condition of Free Blacks, 24 February 1795, n. pag.; reel #8, Committee to Improve the African Race, (cont.)

> She was bound to Christian [illegible] of Philadelphia who sold her to James Collins who sold her to John Bishop who carried her to Virginia who sold her to David Welton of Hardy County, who sold her to George Reynolds of Berkley County, who sold her to Casper Runkis of Frederick County With Whome She is now Held a Slave.[89]

Stephen Adams, a free black from Philadelphia, feared his apprenticed son had been "unproperly transferred" to New Orleans.[90] Abraham Stewart also requested the PAS's assistance in finding his son, having received information that he had been sold by his employer "to a Georgia trader".[91] A concerned relative of another lost apprentice suspected that both he and his father had been "shipped off".[92] Indeed, the record is replete with instances of free blacks searching for their indentured loved ones. Kidnappers frequently bought free blacks from their employers, then transported them south, selling them "for a high price as slaves for life." By this means, hundreds of northern free blacks were reduced to bondage.[93]

The PAS and the New York Manumission Society also investigated a high volume of complaints concerning domestic violence against apprentices. Meeting with the parties involved to resolve the issue, sometimes an understanding was reached

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Minute Book, 1837-53, n. pag.; reel #1, General Minutes, 28 August 1786, General Meeting, Minutes Book, n.d., 211; reel #5, 1816, n.p.

[89] The Pennsylvania Abolition Society Papers, reel #4, Acting Committee, Minute Book, vol. 3, 1798-1810, 29.

[90] Ibid., Committee to Improve the African Race, Minute Book, 1837-53, n.p.

[91] Ibid., reel #5, 1822, n.p.

[92] The New York Manumission Society Records, reel #2, 21 March 1809, n.p.

[93] Meaders 83.

whereby an employer would agree to deal with his charge more leniently.[94] In other instances, the apprentice was found deserving of rough handling.[95] However, in egregious cases of inhumane treatment and physical injury, antislavery societies brought formal charges against employers and attempted to secure the release of the apprentice.

For example, a black girl bound by her mother until age 18 had been "cruelly used by being tied and whipped" over a long period by a Captain J. D. Nelson. According to neighbors, she also frequently went "without shoes & stockings" in cold weather. Often running away to escape abuse, she was once "taken up and put in the Almshouse in a lacerated condition." When her master ultimately was tried in court for his behavior, officials found that the girl actually had been bound to the wife of another man.[96] Similarly, a warrant was issued in 1840 for the arrest of one Newcomb charging him with cruel conduct, alleging that most of his family engaged "in the daily practice of abusing and maltreating [a] girl by striking her about the head and shoulders with an iron poker, shovel, tongs, broom sticks, [and] umbrellas." When the girl came to court, she was so terrified by her master's presence she would not speak out against him, "but her scars testified abundantly for her." While Newcomb claimed his innocence, he offered to pay fifty dollars as compensation, saying, "he has not time to be running

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[94] The Pennsylvania Abolition Society Papers, reel #6, Committee for Improving the Condition of Free Blacks, 27 March 1798, n.p.

[95] Ibid., reel #6, Committee of Guardians, Minute Book, vol. 2, n.d., n.p.

[96] Ibid., reel #5, 1 April 1809, n.p.

down to the court."[97] In the case of a rape involving an indentured 8-year-old girl, two members of the PAS actually followed the perpetrator to New York and Trenton, where he had reportedly fled to escape prosecution, but there is no indication that he ever was caught. Notably, the PAS conferred with members of the free black community, keeping them apprised of any developments. The girl's mother had originally brought the matter to the attention of the agency.[98] Another mother, living in New York, took her abused twelve-year-old son from his master's home and moved to Philadelphia, but the employer pursued them with a warrant, demanding the boy's return. When the issue was brought before the court, it was discovered that the indenture had been forged and the boy was ordered released from the contract.[99]

There is no disposition in the record for most cases of cruel treatment and it is unlikely that they ever were settled satisfactorily. For instance, it was reported that a 9-year-old girl named Violet was "very much abused" by her employer, a grocer. A neighbor testified, "this child has several times been compelled to spend the night in a hog house, and to suffer many similar barbarities."[100] Another woman applied to the PAS, asking for relief from her "pitiable situation". She maintained that during the winter her master "oblig'ed her to go out at night, nearly destitute of clothing, into his stable where she lay in a Dog Kennel; by this means she has been deprived of all her

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[97] The Pennsylvania Abolition Society Records, reel #5, 9 May 1840, n.p.

[98] Ibid., reel #6, Committee for Improving the Condition of Free Blacks, 10 December 1796, 142; Committee of Guardians, Minute Book, vol. 1, 10 December 1796, 172.

[99] Ibid., reel #5, 1806, n.p.

[100] The New York Manumission Society Records, reel #2, vol. 10, 14 May 1818, 297.

Toes on both of her Feet."[101] Her circumstances were not unique. A girl about 10 years old was "treated in a most cruel manner in different ways, by whipping, starving, etc." Moreover, her father indicated, "about 10 days ago her feet were frozen and there is no doubt but she will loose the toes from one of them."[102] And, again, due to exposure another little girl named Louisa lost all of her toes.[103] Most cases of this sort went unreported.

Conclusion

Even under the best conditions, black apprentices could find themselves in difficult, even dangerous, situations. They risked abduction by kidnappers posing as employers or being sold as slaves under the pretense of indentures. Those who did not fall prey to these practices might live in households with abusive, if not sadistic, masters. Consequently, many free blacks were reluctant to apprentice their children, doubting whether these labor arrangements would actually secure them trades and improve their existence.[104] Yet, when forced by economic necessity to bind them nonetheless, parents tried to take advantage of any benefits that these indentures might bring, seeking the intervention of antislavery agencies when children were inhumanely

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[101] The Pennsylvania Abolition Society Papers, reel #6, Committee of Guardians, Minute Book, vol. 2, 20.

[102] The New York Manumission Society Records, reel #2, vol. 10, n.d., 162.

[103] The Pennsylvania Abolition Society Papers, reel #6, Committee of Guardians, Minute Book, vol. 2, n.d., 54.

[104] Bell, ed., 1855 National Convention Minutes 16.

treated or when employers otherwise failed to adhere to the terms of labor agreements. Given the formidable obstacles that parents faced, their efforts should be commended.

At the same time, while both black and white reformers encouraged skilled apprenticeships, their reasons for doing so substantively differed. White reformers preferred that blacks be trained as farmers and mechanics primarily to cultivate virtue and character, fearing that apprentices indented as servants might not be instructed in the principles of morality and religion. In their view, menial labor only enhanced the thoughtless nature of free blacks and their fondness for "amusements". Thus, white reformers generally were interested in blacks' social elevation only insofar as it kept them from burdening white citizens.

Black reformers linked apprenticeships directly to racial advancement, tying the acquisition of skilled trades more closely to social mobility and material progress. They advised free blacks to pursne mechanical trades specifically to gain political rights and influence.[105] This is not to say that black reformers did not hold industry, economy and other reform principles as being intrinsically worthy, but that their advocacy of these social values was infused with political meaning.

[105] Foner and Walker, eds., Detroit, Michigan Convention, 1843, vol. 1, 189.

CONCLUSION

Pursuing apprenticeships and other reform objectives probably seemed pointless to many free blacks. Their daily experience belied the assertion that their status would change through hard work and education. An English traveler likewise observed:

> To be excluded, directly or virtually from many employments, (for the whites will not work with them,) and to be despised in all, affords but sorry inducements to honesty and self-correction. What attachment can they have to virtue, when it affords them no protection, and meets with no reward?[106]

Or as Benjamin Banneker put it, "to struggle incessantly against want, [was in] no way favorable to improvement."[107] James Forten, one of Philadelphia's leading black citizens, was bitterly disappointed over the passage of a bill preventing free African Americans from moving to Pennsylvania. Failing to convince the State Legislature after repeated appeals to abort the measure, he concluded, "it is in vain that we are forming societies of different kinds to ameliorate the conditions of our unfortunate brethren, to correct their morals and to render them not only honest but useful members to society. All our efforts by this bill are despised..."[108] An educational society in Philadelphia also acknowledged moral reform's inability to secure blacks' equal rights. It inserted a clause in its Constitution declaring that racism rendered it "almost

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[106] Edward S. Abdy, Journal of a Residence and Tour of the United States of North America, 3 vols. (London, 1835) vol. 1, 92.

[107] "Letter from Benjamin Banneker to the Secretary of State With His Answer," ed. Dorothy B. Porter, Early Negro Writing, 1760-1837 (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971) 328.

[108] Speech by James Forten, 1813 – A Late Bill Before the Senate of Pennsylvania, ed. Carter G. Woodson, Negro Orators and Their Orations (New York: Russell & Russell, 1969) 50.

impossible" to obtain adequate training for black children.[109] Similarly, Boston's Maria Stewart, noted lecturer and reformer, commented nearly 15 years later, "considering how little we have to excite or stimulate us, I am almost astonished that [there] are so many industrious and ambitious ones to be found".[110] Other reformers stressed black apathy toward self-improvement, yet substantial evidence strongly suggests that many African Americans were receptive to educational reform measures, with some important qualifications.

They responded most favorably to the Sunday school movement, attending Sabbath schools in far greater numbers than their proportion in the population. While comprising only nine percent of New York City's population, they made up over 25% of the 43 schools administered by a single Union, raising questions about the extent to which moral reform, in fact, was imposed upon them. Moreover, they primarily sought literacy, as opposed to religious instruction, subverting the aims of white reformers who wanted their focus to be conversion.

At the same time, free blacks seldom joined literary associations. Given their limited employment opportunities, they did not discern any clear benefits of higher education. The most successful black literary societies appear to be those that offered instruction in English grammar, basic writing and arithmetic; as well as literary societies that held lectures and debates on issues of general interest to the broader black

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[109] Prince Saunders, "An Address Delivered at Bethel Church, Philadelphia; on the 30th of September, 1818, Before the Pennsylvania Augustine Society, for the Education of People of Colour, To Which is Annexed the Constitution of the Society," ed. Porter, Early Negro Writing 92.

[110] "A Lecture by Maria W. Stewart, given at Franklin Hall, Boston, September 21, 1832", ed. Porter, Early Negro Writing 137.

public. Nonetheless, most members of the Banneker Institute were common laborers, and this working class composition may have been typical of most black literary societies since the black "middle-class" contained unskilled workers interested in discussing history, science, the classics and contemporary politics.

Meanwhile, reformers of the African Methodist Episcopal Church faced stiff opposition from a majority of clerics concerned that education would take primacy over piety as a ministerial qualification. Yet, after hearing arguments about the need for education among African Americans, they opted to adopt the new standards, even if enforcement of the measures was uneven. Likewise, other proposed changes in traditional church practices, like the introduction of choirs and musical instruments, met with strong disapproval, making these polities even more difficult to implement. But, again, reformers managed to sway many opponents over to their position and the controversy was resolved without causing a lasting breach between literate and nonliterate factions, once more raising doubts as to whether the leadership's push for moral improvement was fundamentally at variance with most congregants.

Parents and guardians also resisted apprenticing their children, likening these labor arrangements to enslavement. Many youths were held as servants beyond the expiration of their terms or transported south and sold into servitude. Others were not taught reading and writing as stipulated by their indentures. The fact that so many free blacks still entered into these contracts reflects their dire financial circumstances. Yet, they also wanted their children to learn trades and gain the rudiments of an elementary education and it is likely that more parents would have placed their children had they been able to do so under more favorable conditions.

Many free blacks, in fact, valued apprenticeships, unaware that they were following a reform agenda. They simply wanted to secure a better life for their children. They also worked hard, saved their earnings and practiced abstinence because their success or failure depended upon it. To ascribe their actions to a desire for "middle-class" status actually allows them more freedom of choice than their circumstances permitted. Free blacks knew that they would have to work harder to achieve than others, and reformers used this common understanding to articulate a political program; one based on the pursuit of education, industry and economy. This platform did not represent the elite vision of a privileged class bent on social control. Rather, it reflected recognition of the formidable obstacles that free blacks faced and a supreme faith in their ability to rise above their degraded condition.

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PRHS – Presbyterian Historical Society
NYHS – New York Historical Society
NYPL – New York Public Library
SCHOM – Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture
AC– Amherst College Archives
SC – Smith College Archives
UMASS – University of Massachusetts at Amherst Archives

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